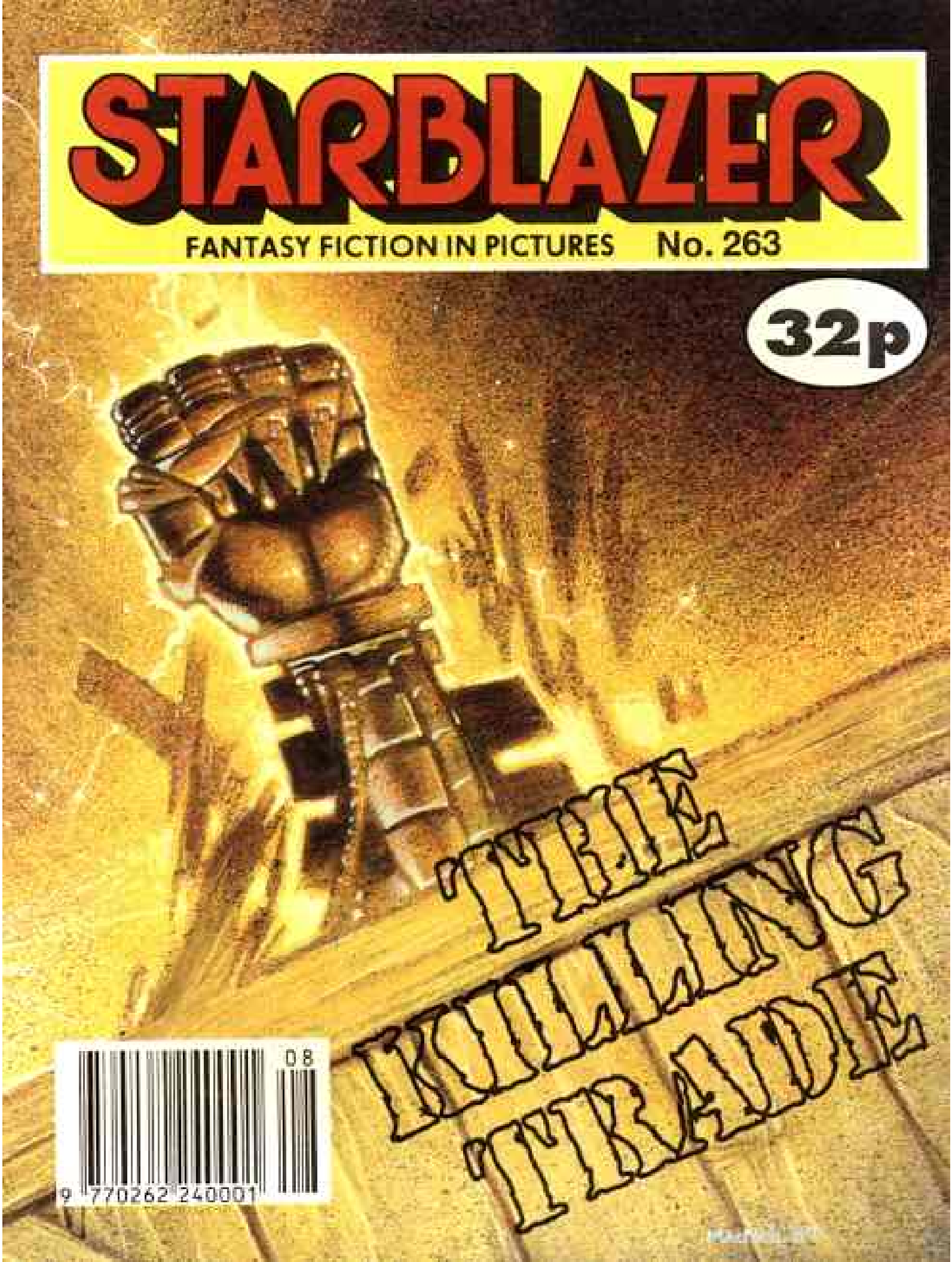
STARBLAZER

FANTASY FICTION IN PICTURES No. 263

32p



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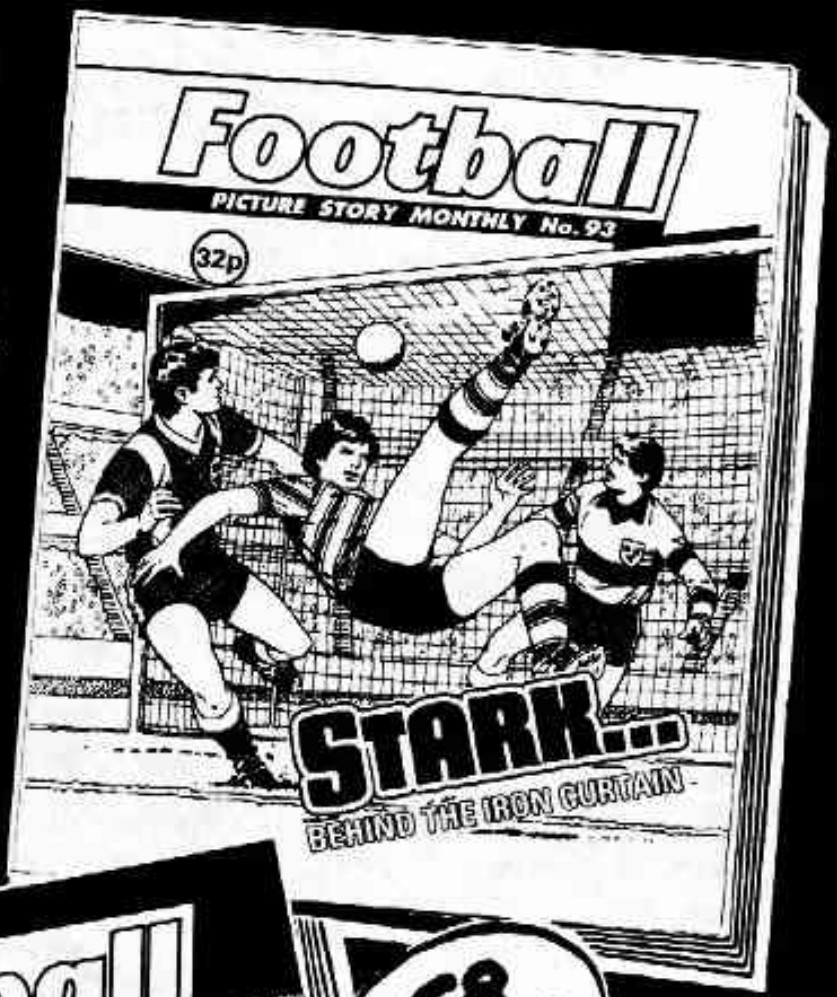
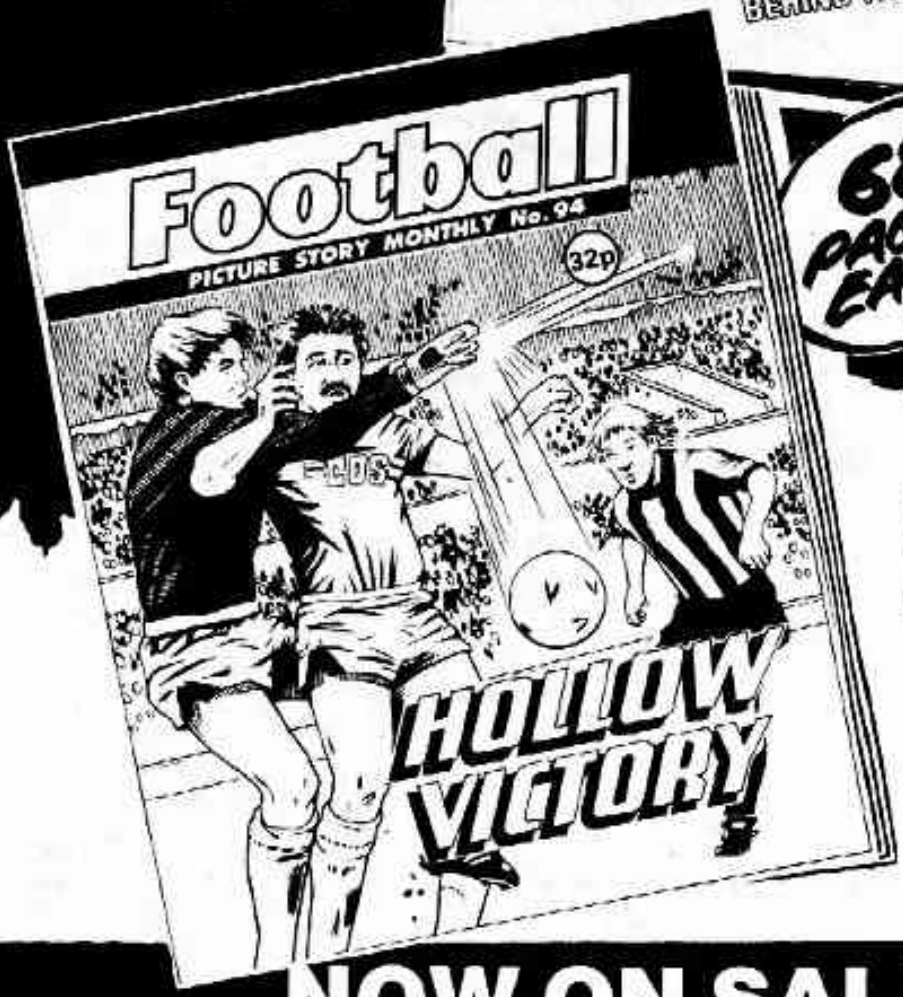
IF YOU'RE A FOOTBALL FAN, YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO MISS THESE!





68 PAGES EACH

FOOTBALL LIBRARIES Nos. 93+94

NOW ON SALE 32p

THE KILLING TRADE

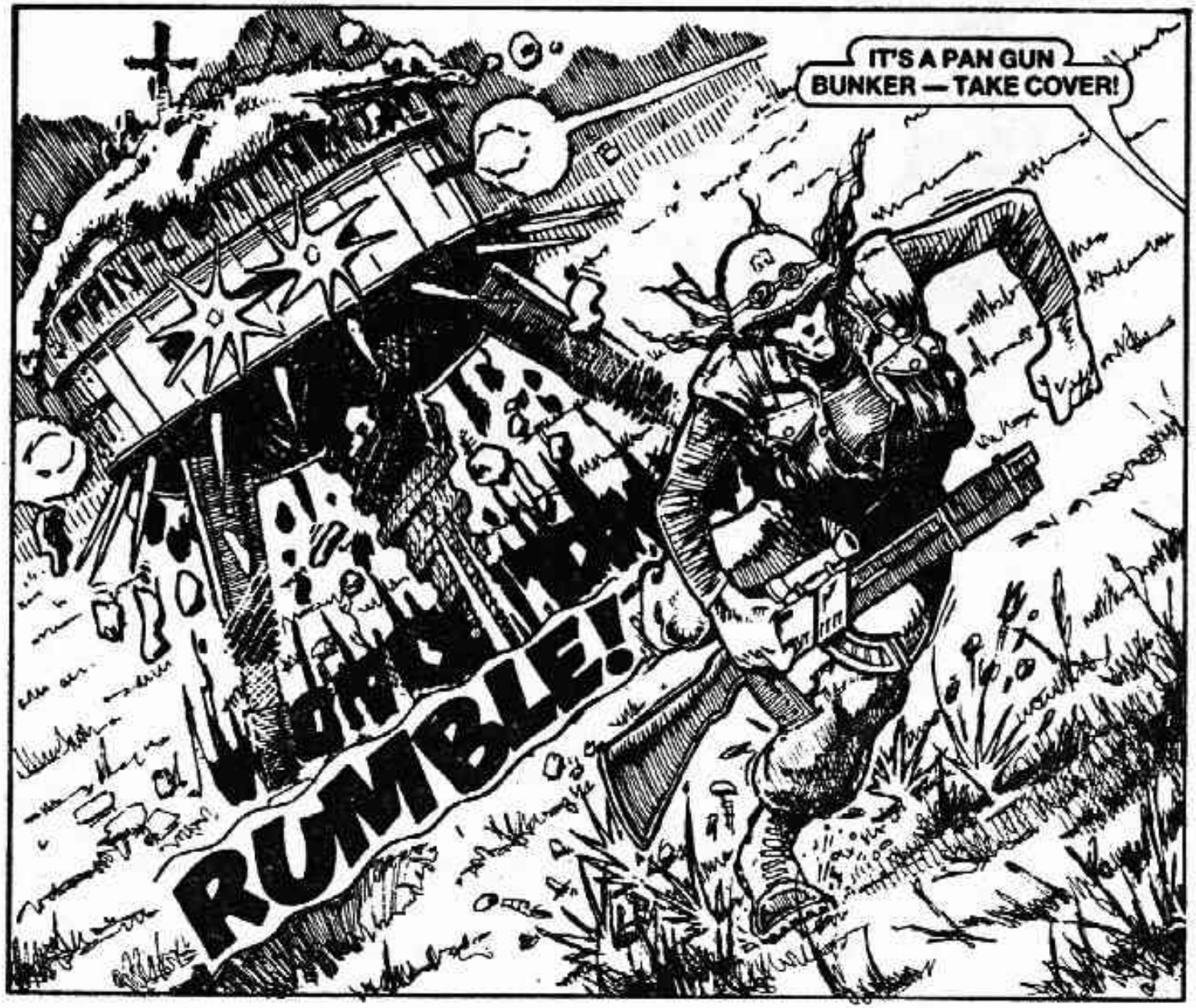
FURTHER DOWN THE LINE, A FUSSY OMNIPLEX CAPTAIN SOUGHT OUT A BATTLE-WEARY UNIT.

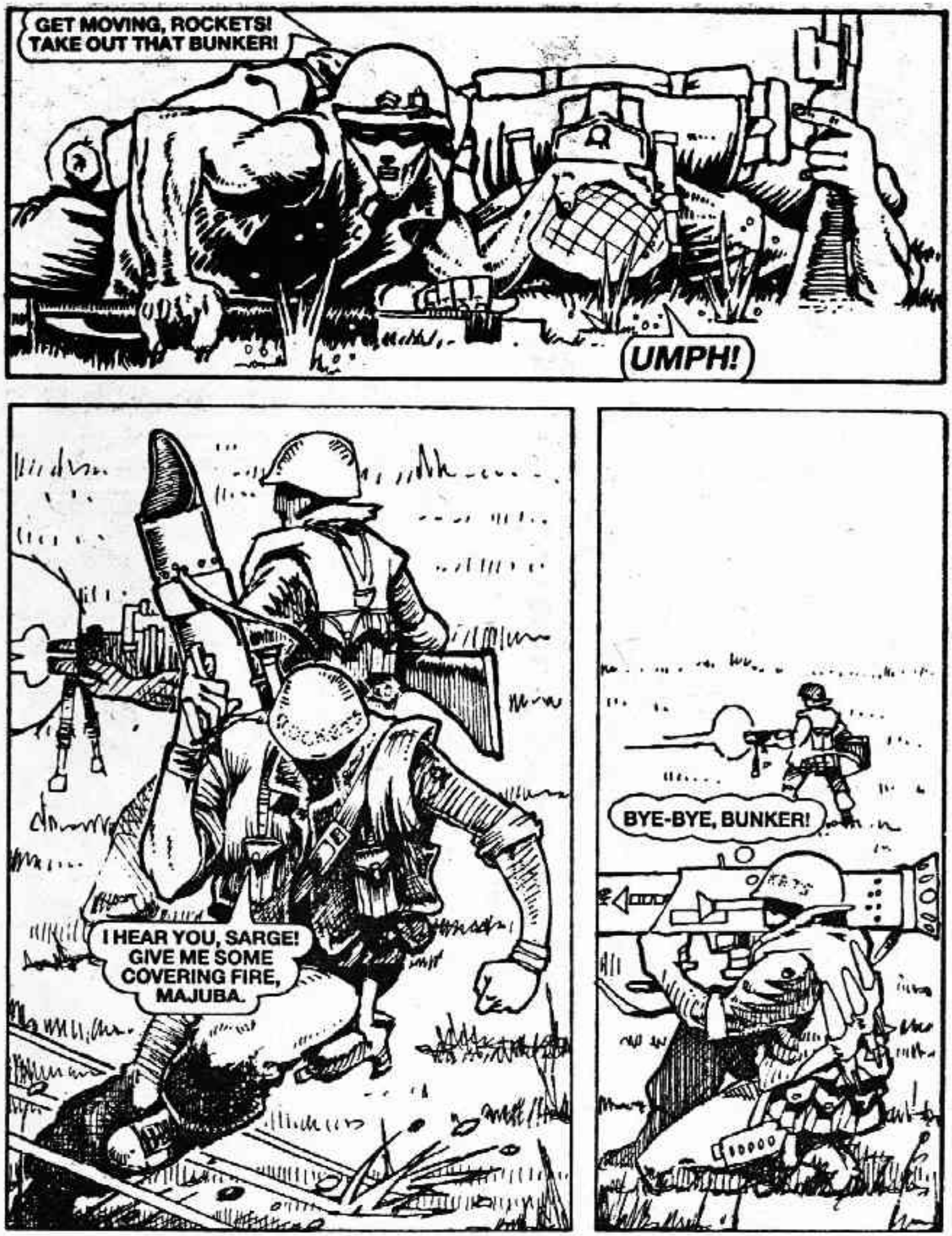
WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?

THE SARGE . . . SERGEANT BRENNAN, CAPTAIN, SIR!

BRENNAN TOOK HIS PLATOON OUT ACROSS THE BATTLEFIELD.
THINK THERE WAS EVER A SEA HERE, SARGE?
SHUT UP, CHERRY!
BUT SARGE, I CAN'T SWIM . . .
OUT AT POINT —
HOLD IT!
MARTA'S SENSED SOMETHING . . .
MARTA — THE PLATOON SCOUT, NEVER SPOKE, NEVER SMILED, BUT HER SIXTH SENSE PICKED UP TROUBLE BEFORE IT HAPPENED.

WHY'S SHE RUNNING? THERE'S NO DANGER HERE — THE PLACE IS DESERTED . . .
I THINK I CAN HEAR SOMETHING . . .


IT'S A PAN GUN BUNKER — TAKE COVER!
PAN-
RUMBLE!


GET MOVING, ROCKETS! TAKE OUT THAT BUNKER!
UMPH!
I HEAR YOU, SARGE! GIVE ME SOME COVERING FIRE, MAJUBA.
BYE-BYE, BUNKER!

PLOP!
OH, NO . . . A DUD!

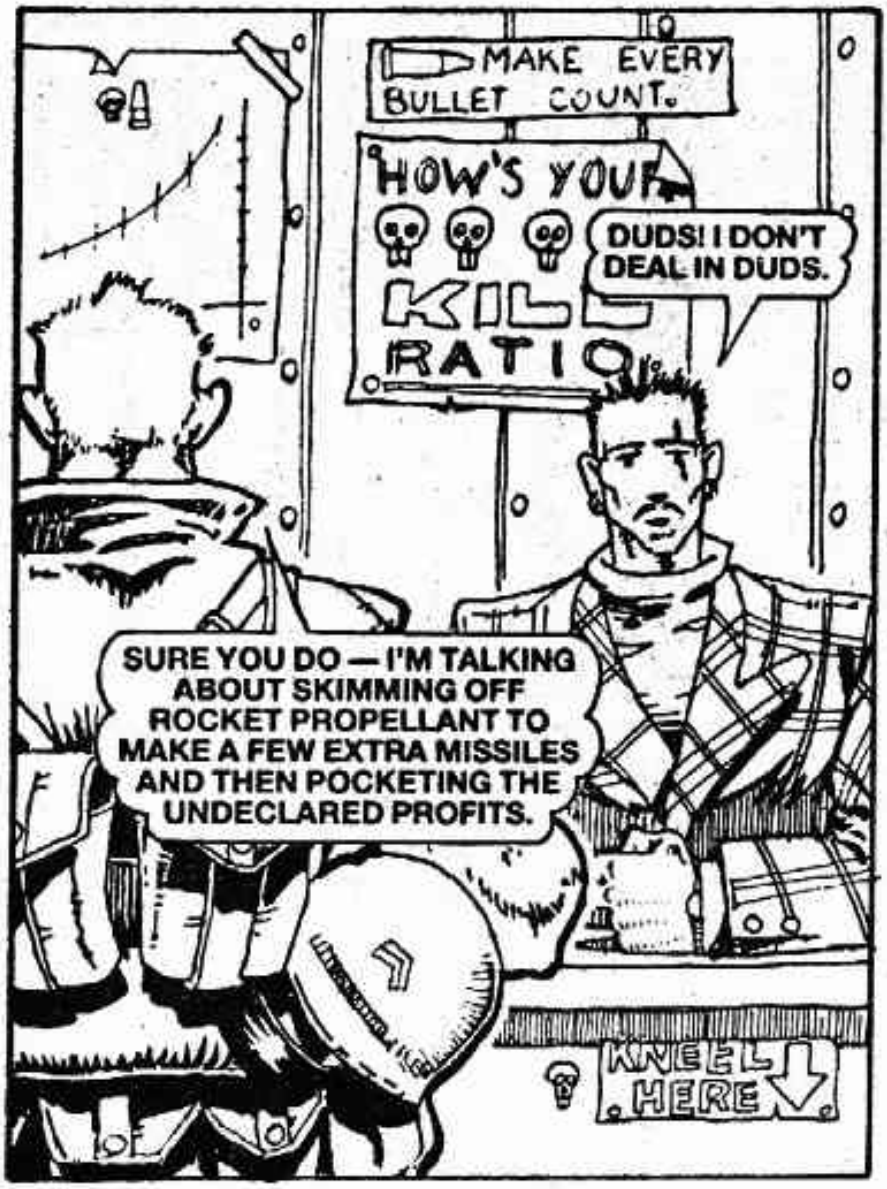
EEEARGH!
ZAP
ZAP

AS ROCKETS LAY IN HIS DEATH THROES, BLADES CLAMBERED UNSEEN ONTO THE TURRET.
YOU AREN'T GETTING ME LIKE YOU GOT ROCKETS.

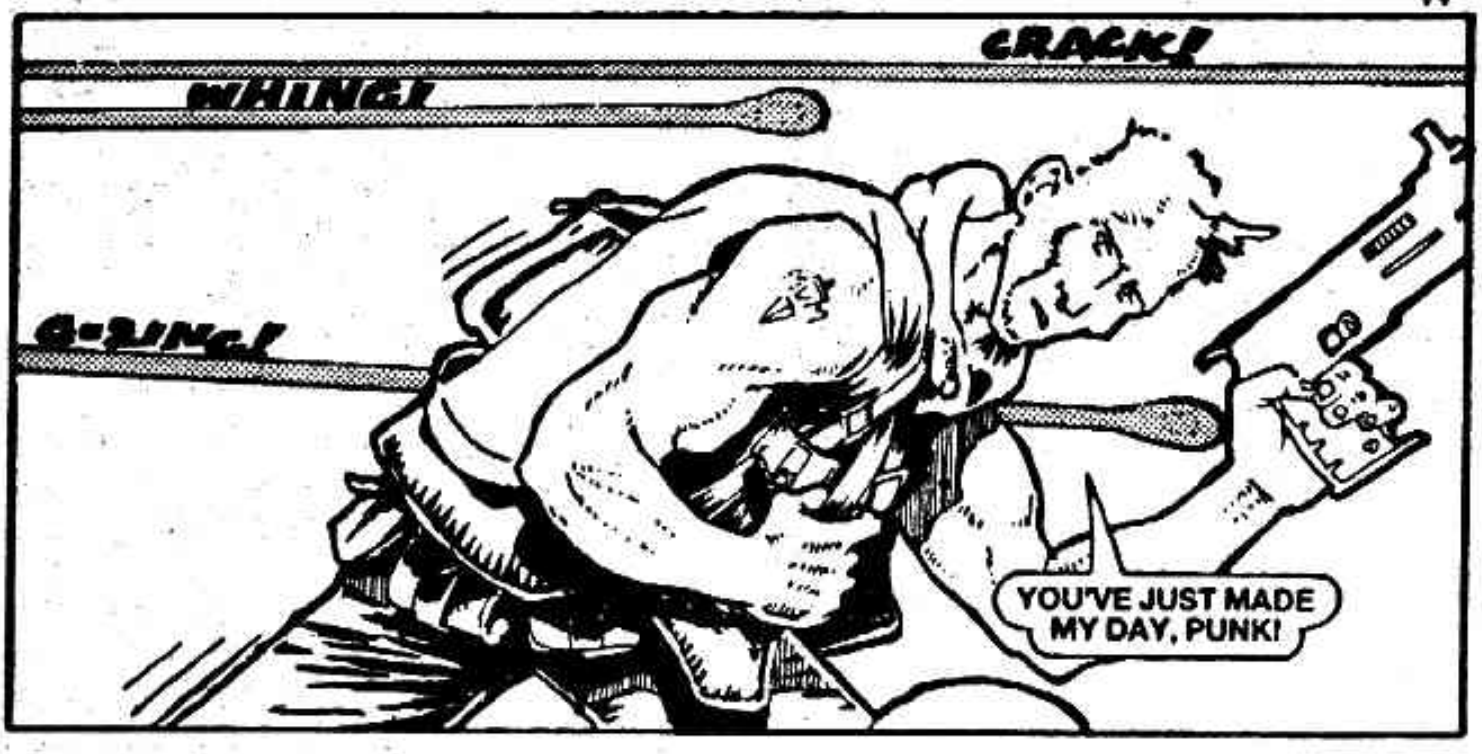
BOOM

POOR ROCKETS.
IT WAS THE DUD THAT KILLED HIM!
ANOTHER DUD! SEEMS TO ME THAT SOMEBODY SHOULD HAVE A SERIOUS WORD WITH THAT CREEP SHARKY DOWN AT HARDWARE . . .

BEHIND THE LINES — SEVERAL DAYS LATER.
SHARKY'S HARDWARE-STORE
WEAPON FOR EVERY OCCASION
WHAT DO YOU WANT, BRENNAN?
WELL SHARKY, I WANT TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT A DUD ROCKET.


MAKE EVERY BULLET COUNT.
HOW'S YOUR KILL RATIO
DUDS! I DON'T DEAL IN DUDS.
SURE YOU DO — I'M TALKING ABOUT SKIMMING OFF ROCKET PROPELLANT TO MAKE A FEW EXTRA MISSILES AND THEN POCKETING THE UNDECLARED PROFITS.
KNEEL HERE

WE'LL SEE WHAT THE OMNIPLEX REVENUE BOYS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT IT . . . INDIVIDUAL PROFITEERING OUTSIDE THE COMPANY STRUCTURE IS AN OFFENCE PUNISHABLE BY DEATH.
YOU'RE NOT GOING ANYWHERE, BRENNAN!

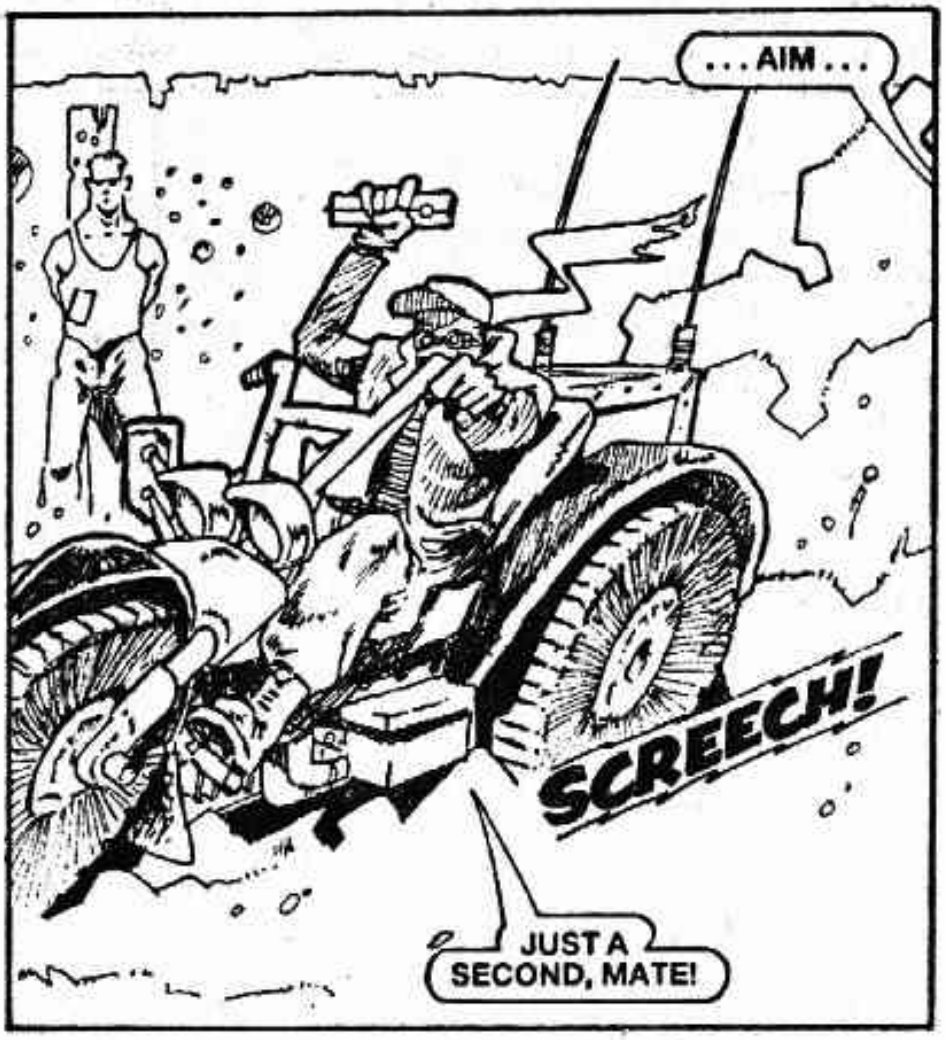

CRACK!
WHING!
G-ZUNG!
YOU'VE JUST MADE MY DAY, PUNK!

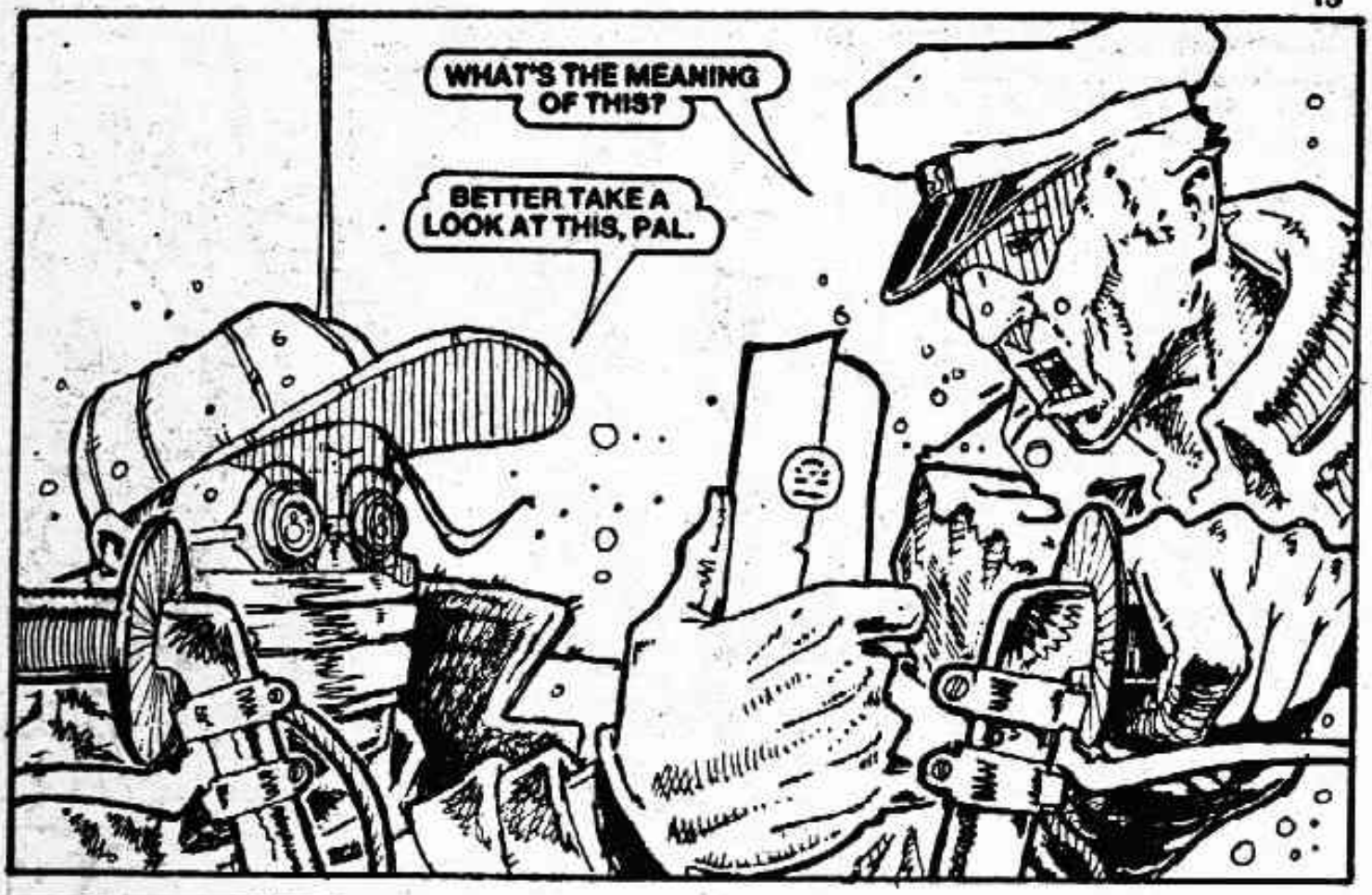
BL'AM!
BYY . . . EEE!

OKAY, FELLA, LOSE THE PIECE . . . NICE 'N' EASY.
BACK TO THE WAR
IT WAS SELF-DEFENCE.
SAVE IT FOR THE COURT-MARTIAL.

BRENNAN WAS COURT-MARTIALED BEFORE LUNCH, FOUND GUILTY BEFORE DINNER AND WAS SENT FOR EXECUTION AT SUPPER TIME.
ANY LAST REQUESTS?
YEAH . . . COULD YOU PLAY FIXIN' TO DIE BY COUNTRY JOE?

SMART ASS . . . READY . . .


. . . AIM . . .
SCREECH!
JUST A SECOND, MATE!

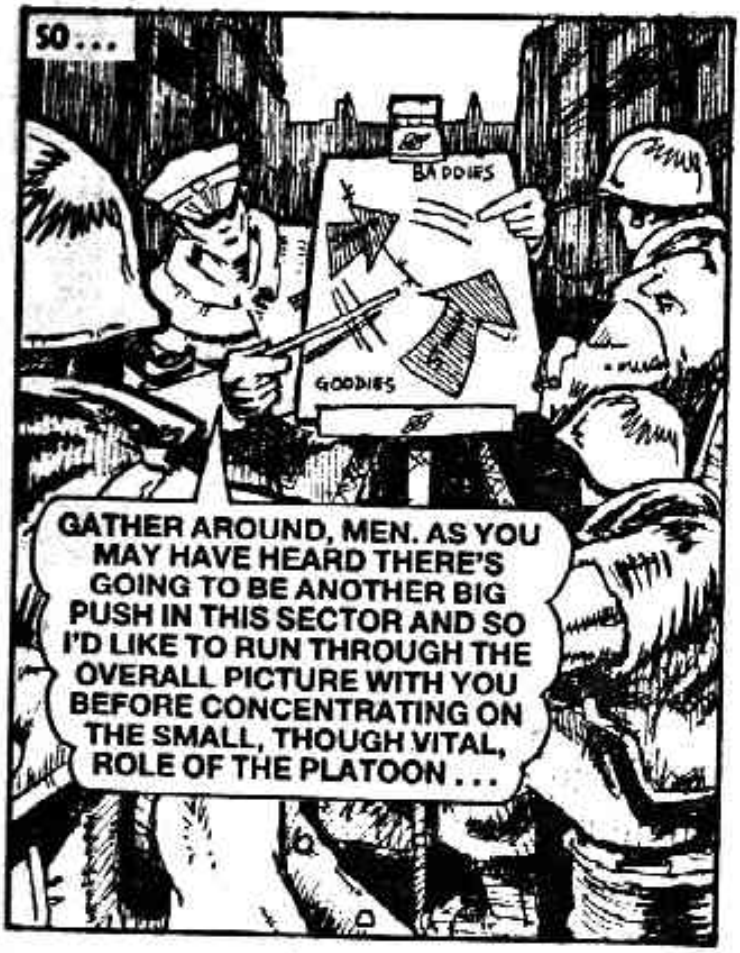

WHAT'S THE MEANING OF THIS?
BETTER TAKE A LOOK AT THIS, PAL.

I — I DON'T BELIEVE IT! THE CHAIRMAN . . . THE CHAIRMAN OF OMNIPLEX INDUSTRIES HIMSELF, WANTS TO SEE THE PRISONER.

BOY, ARE YOU IN TROUBLE NOW, FELLA!

BRENNAN WAS QUICKLY WHISKED AWAY BY THE DESPATCH RIDER.
ARE WE GOING TO SEE THE CHAIRMAN?
NOPE!
WHA—!
HIYA, SARGE!
WE FIGURED WE OWED YOU ONE, SARGE. THE LETTER WAS FORGED!

SOME DAYS LATER . . .
HEADS UP, YOU GRUNTS. THIS HERE'S SECOND LIEUTENANT BICKLEY. HE'S YOUR NEW PLATOON LEADER.
HE'S A SCHOOLBOY!!


SO . . .
BADDIES
GOODIES
GATHER AROUND, MEN. AS YOU MAY HAVE HEARD THERE'S GOING TO BE ANOTHER BIG PUSH IN THIS SECTOR AND SO I'D LIKE TO RUN THROUGH THE OVERALL PICTURE WITH YOU BEFORE CONCENTRATING ON THE SMALL, THOUGH VITAL, ROLE OF THE PLATOON . . .

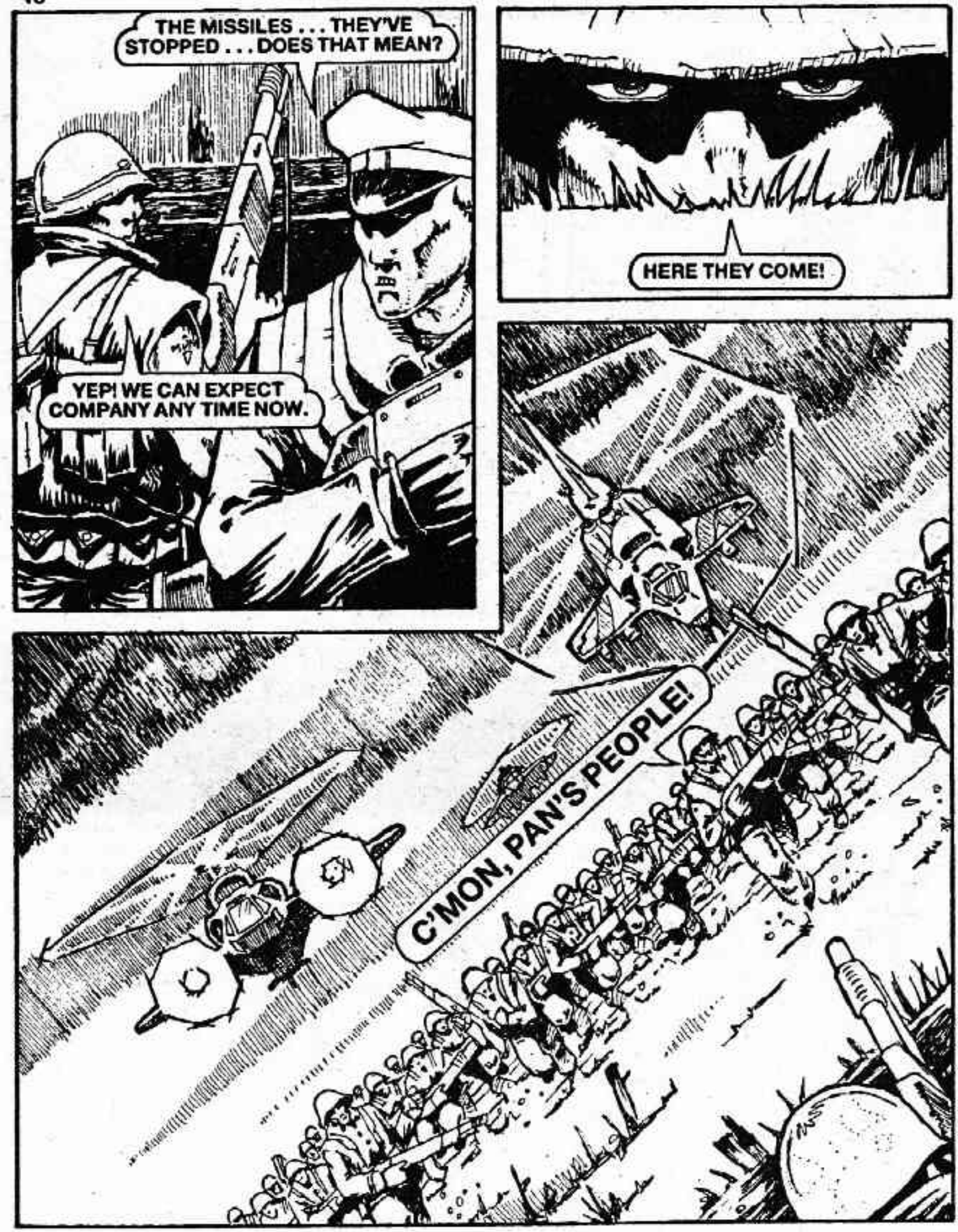
. . . AND I'M POSITIVE THAT YOU'LL ALL DO YOUR VERY BEST TO MAKE THIS OFFENSIVE THE MOST COST EFFECTIVE AND SUCCESSFUL YET.
I THINK WE'RE IN TROUBLE . . .
WE WERE IN TROUBLE BEFORE HE CAME . . . THIS IS WORSE!

THE MORNING OF THE OFFENSIVE.
IT'S ALMOST ZERO-HOUR. TIMING IS EVERYTHING SERGEANT.
YESSIR!

I'LL GET AN UPDATE. HELLO, HELLO. PATCH ME THROUGH TO SECTOR FOUR H.Q.
YOU'VE GOT A TELEPHONE ON YOUR ASSAULT RIFLE?
MVM
OF COURSE, IT'S VITAL TO MAINTAIN A DIRECT COMMUNICATIONS LINK.

SUDDENLY...
BOOM!
BANG!
INCOMING!
IT-IT CAN'T BE... IT'S NOT ZERO HOUR YET...

MEBBE YOU SHOULD'VE INVITED THE PANS TO YOUR LITTLE PEP TALK LOOTENANT — THEN THEY'D HAVE KNOWN WHEN IT WAS THEIR TURN TO OPEN FIRE!


THE MISSILES . . . THEY'VE STOPPED . . . DOES THAT MEAN?
YEP! WE CAN EXPECT COMPANY ANY TIME NOW.
HERE THEY COME!
C'MON, PAN'S PEOPLE!

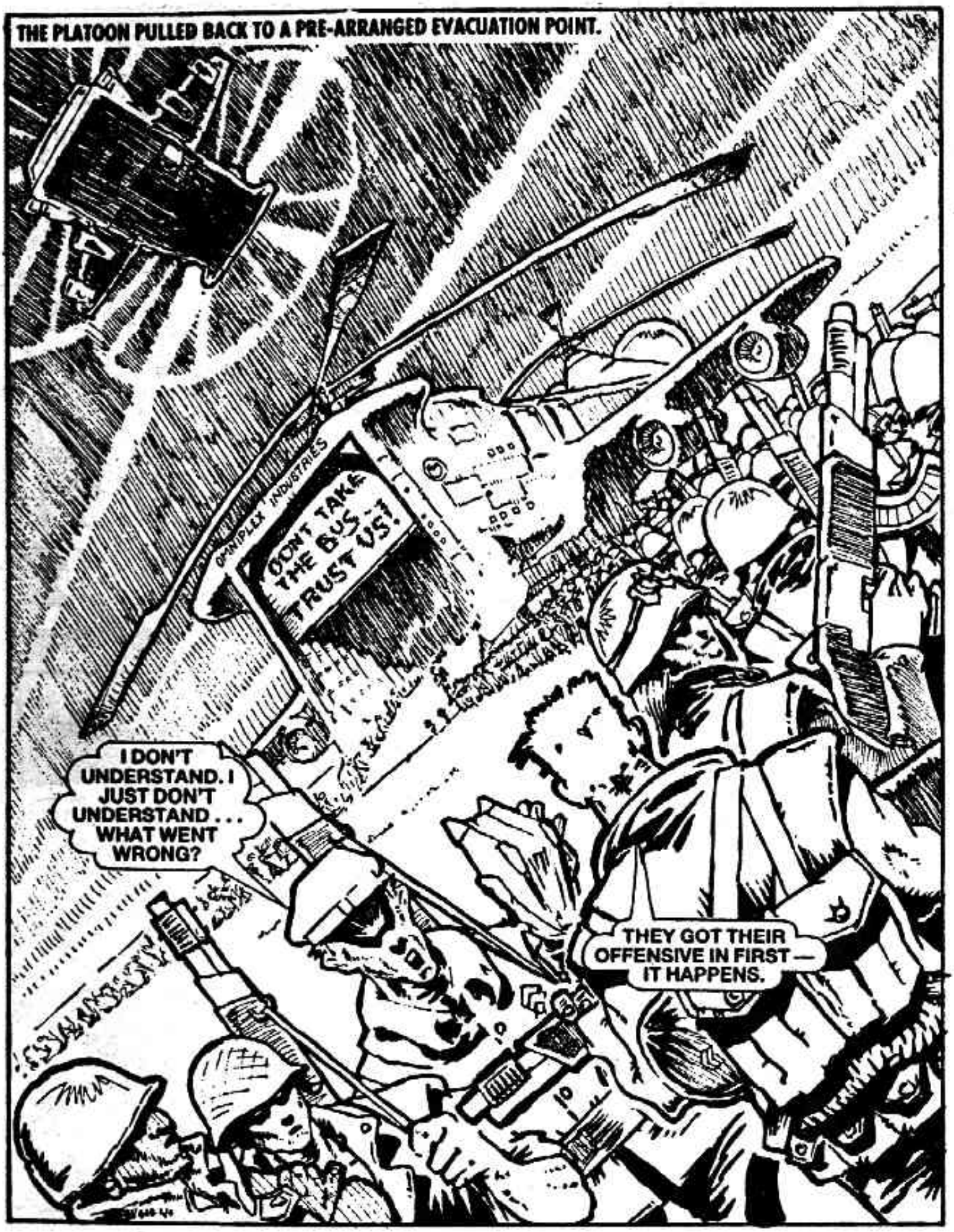
I'M FED UP SITTIN' HERE — LET'S GO WALKABOUT.

BRENNAN AND HIS SQUAD ALSO WENT BEATABOUT—
SO NICE OF YOU TO COME AND MEET US!

BICKLEY! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
LOOKING FOR A CONTINGENCY PLAN . . . THERE MUST BE A CONTINGENCY PLAN IN THE MANUAL.

A CONTINGENCY PLAN. WELL, WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY SO EARLIER . . . I'VE GOT JUST THE ONE FOR THIS VERY SITUATION . . .

. . . LET'S GET THE HELL OUTA HERE!


THE PLATOON PULLED BACK TO A PRE-ARRANGED EVACUATION POINT.
OMNIPLEX INDUSTRIES
DON'T TAKE THE BUS. TRUST US!
I DON'T UNDERSTAND. I JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND . . . WHAT WENT WRONG?
THEY GOT THEIR OFFENSIVE IN FIRST — IT HAPPENS.

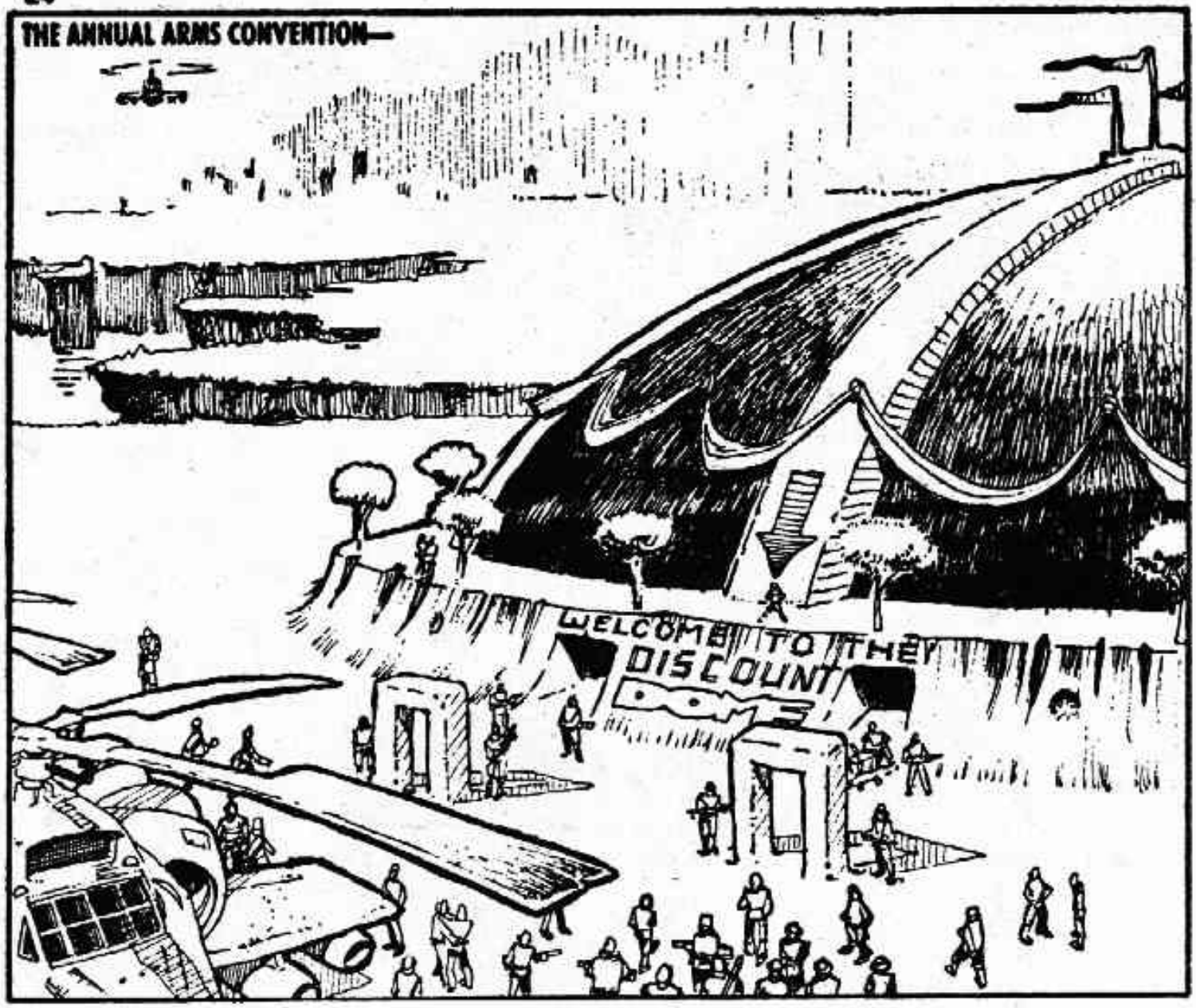
A NEW FRONT LINE WAS QUICKLY ESTABLISHED AND THE ENDLESS WAR RUMBLED ON.
GEE, SARGE, NEARLY EVERY CLIP I FIRE NOWADAYS HAS A DUD IN IT.
SAME HERE, SARGE, I'D BE BETTER OFF SWINGING THIS THING LIKE A CLUB. WITH SHARKY DEAD I THOUGHT WE'D SEEN THE LAST OF THESE DUDS.
NOT A CHANCE, NOT UNTIL WE NAIL SHARKY'S SUPPLIER . . .

FORGET IT! THOSE ARMS-DEALERS NEVER COME ANYWHERE NEAR THE FRONT-LINE. THERE'S NO WAY WE'RE EVER GONNA GET WITHIN FIFTY KLIKS OF ANY OF THEM!
YOU'RE WRONG, BLADES.

WE'VE GOT AN INVITATION.
WHAT'S THAT?
CLEVER, SARGE, BUT IT AIN'T NO USE. THOSE ARMS-DEALERS ARE SMART BUSINESSMEN AND WE'RE JUST IGNORANT GRUNTS. THEY'D SPOT US WITHIN FIVE SECONDS.
IT'S A PASS CARD TO THE ANNUAL ARMS CONVENTION. I PALMED IT OFF SHARKY'S DESK.
YOU'RE RIGHT. SO WHAT WE NEED IS SOMEONE WHO LOOKS AND THINKS THE WAY A BUSINESS EXECUTIVE DOES . . .

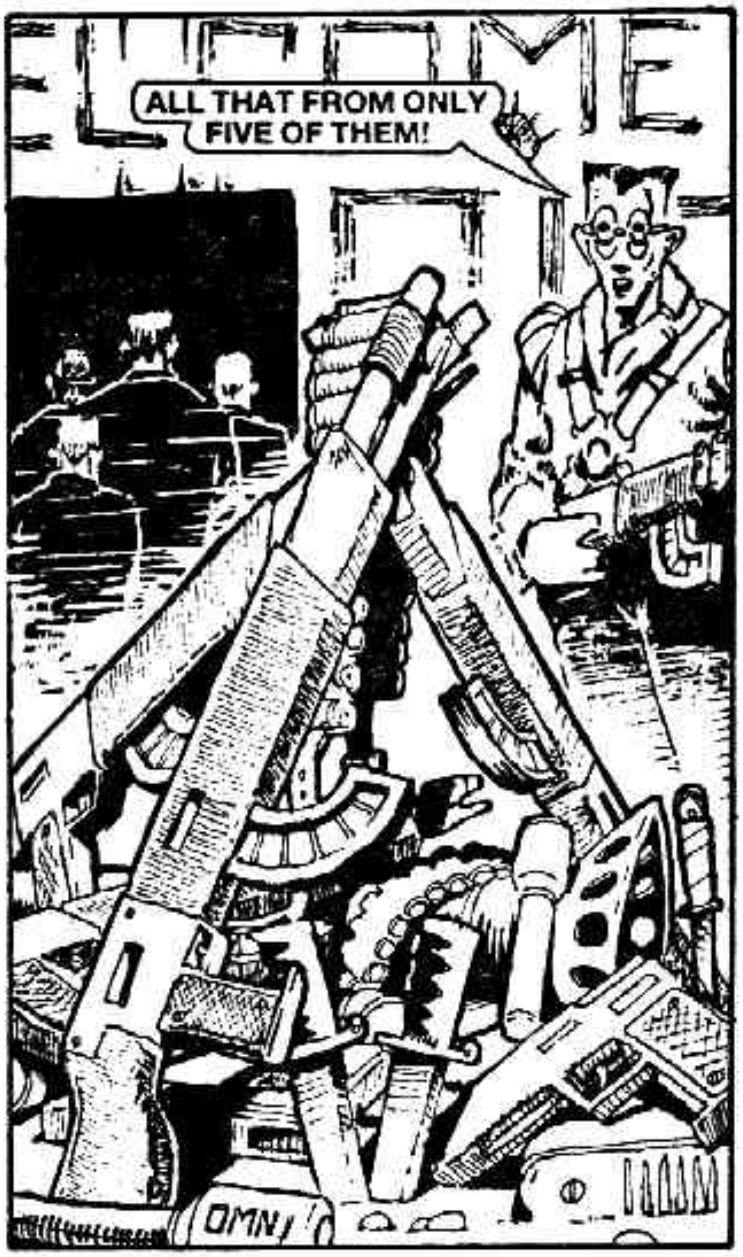
MR BICKLEY!
EH?
OMNI COMP

THE ANNUAL ARMS CONVENTION—



THESE ARE MY BODYGUARDS.
OH!

BUT AT THE SCANNER—
HOLD IT, GUYS! NO PRIVATE WEAPONS ALLOWED IN THE EXHIBITION HALL — DROP 'EM HERE.
BEEP!
BEEP!


ALL THAT FROM ONLY FIVE OF THEM!
OMNI

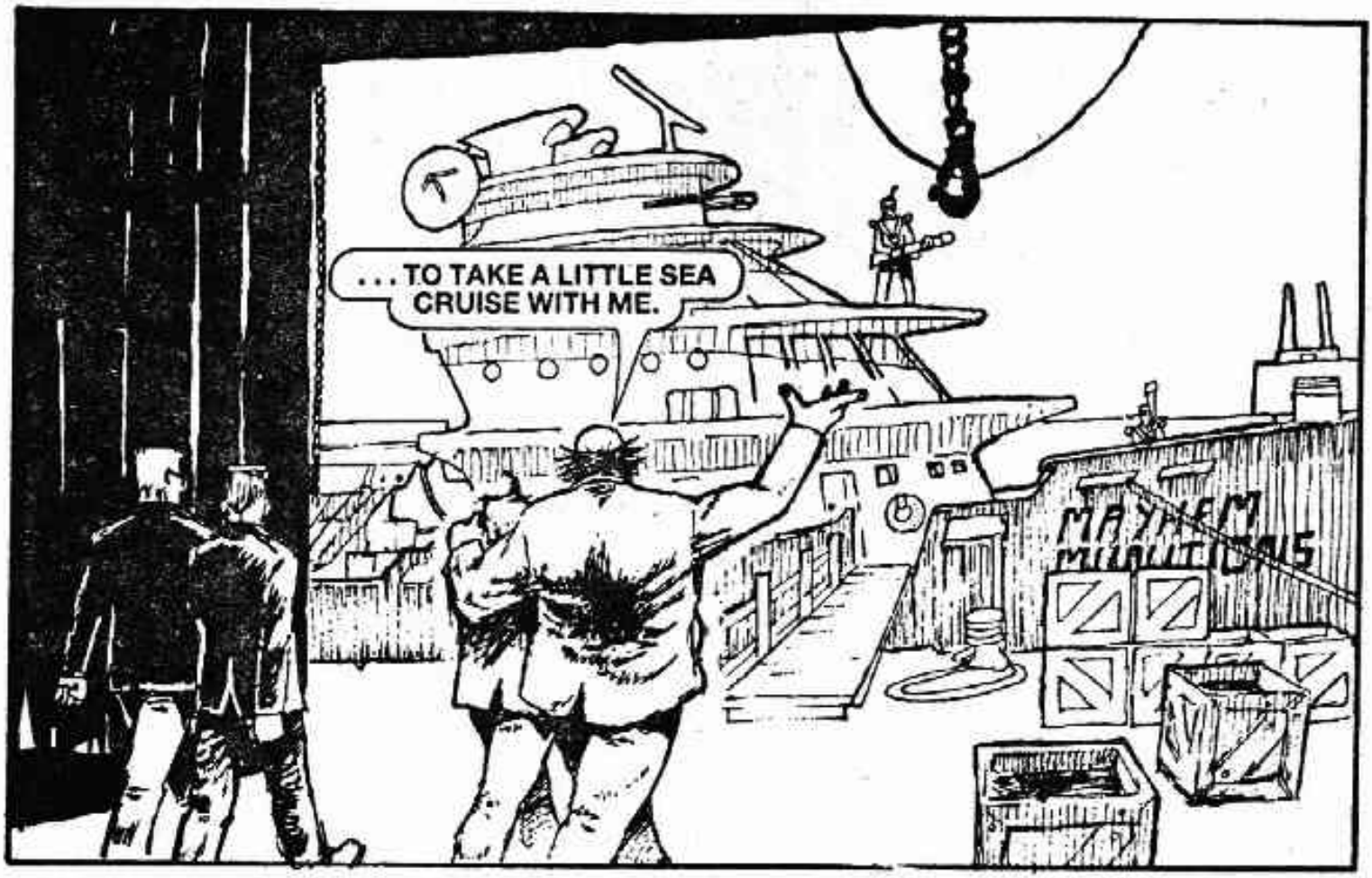
NUCLEAR SMALL ARMS.
THE AHEAD
ROCKET LAUNCH
WILLYA JUST LOOK AT ALL THIS HARDWARE.

WELL, WE'RE IN, SERGEANT . . . NOW WHAT?
THE LAZER KNIFE CUTS THROUGH ANYTHING
I HAVEN'T THE FAINTEST IDEA . . .

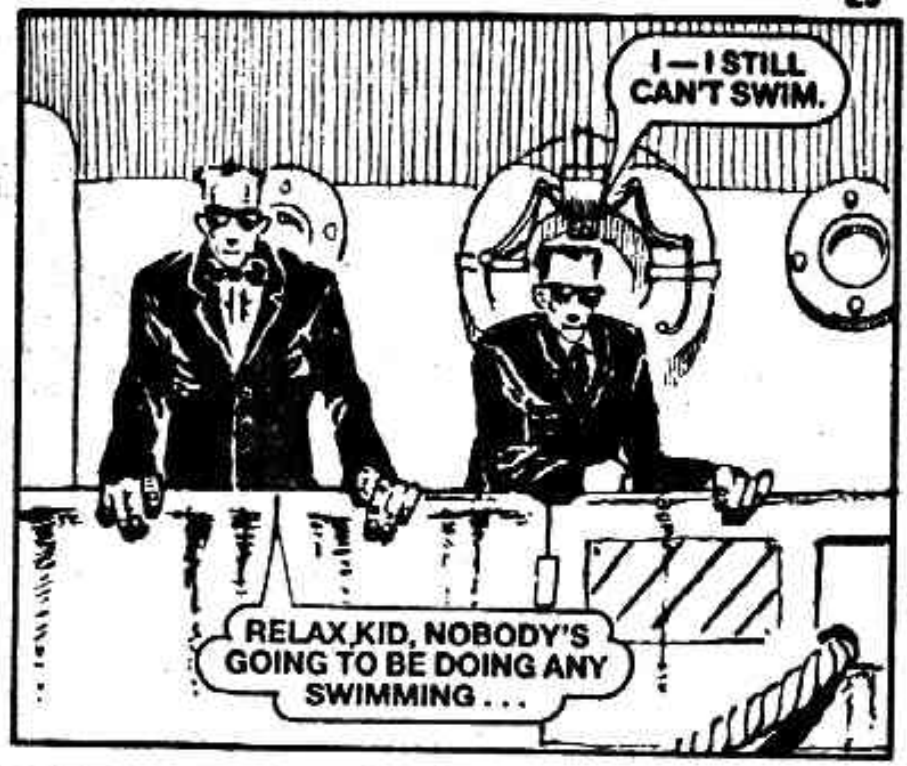
THEN . . .
YOU THERE — WAIT!
M-ME?
UH-OH!
ACCORDING TO THE ACCESS COMPUTER YOU'RE USING SHARKY'S INVITATION — IS THAT RIGHT?
WELL — I SUPPOSE . . . ER . . . I MEAN — YES, THAT'S CORRECT.
SPLENDID! I WAS THE LATE SHARKY'S SUPPLIER. NOW THAT YOU'VE TAKEN OVER HIS BUSINESS I'LL BE SUPPLYING YOU TOO.

COME ALONG THEN, WE HAVE A LOT TO DISCUSS. I'M MAYHEM BY THE WAY — MR MAYHEM!
PLEASED TO MEET YOU!

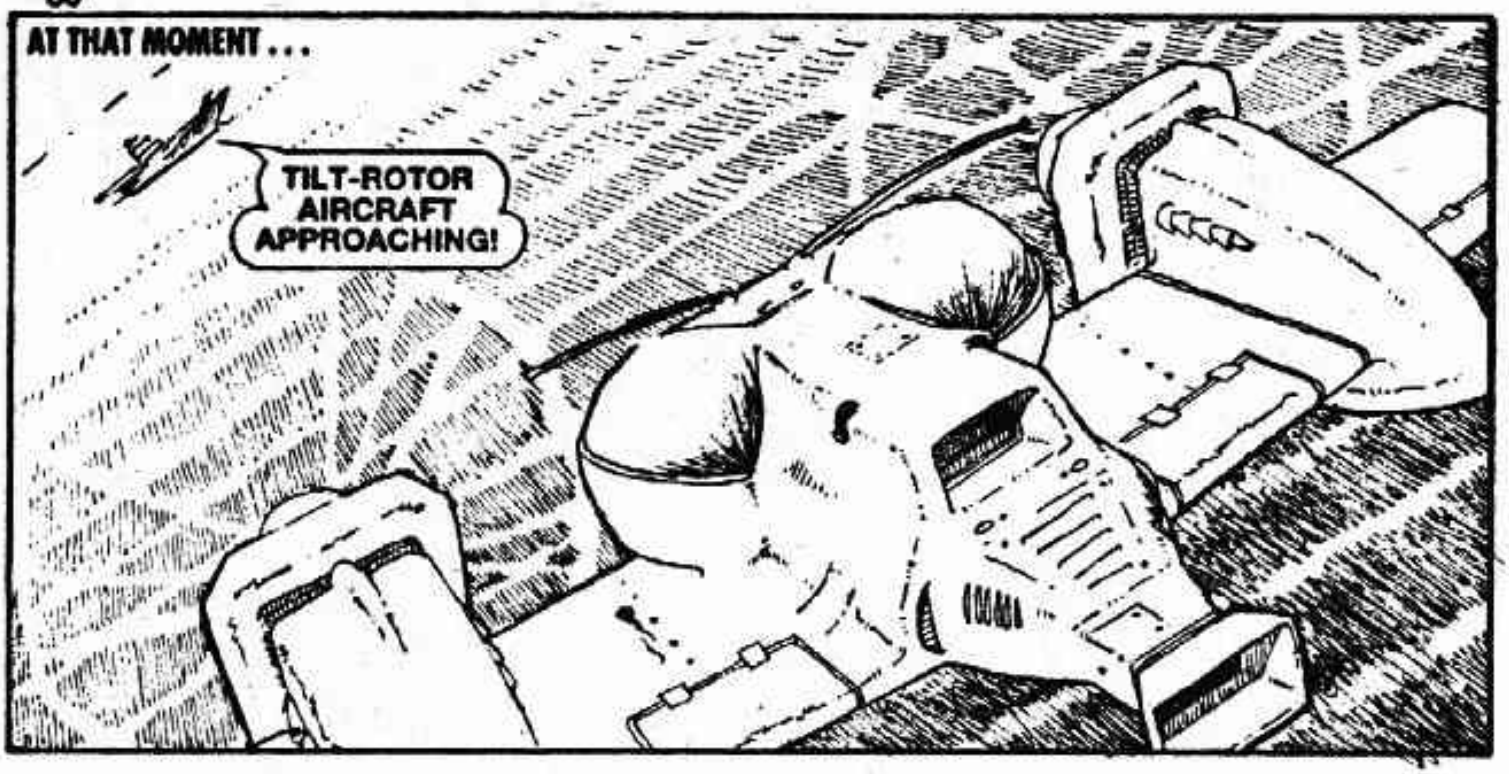
I'M ON MY WAY TO MEET SOME VERY IMPORTANT CLIENTS, SO YOU'VE ARRIVED JUST IN TIME . . .

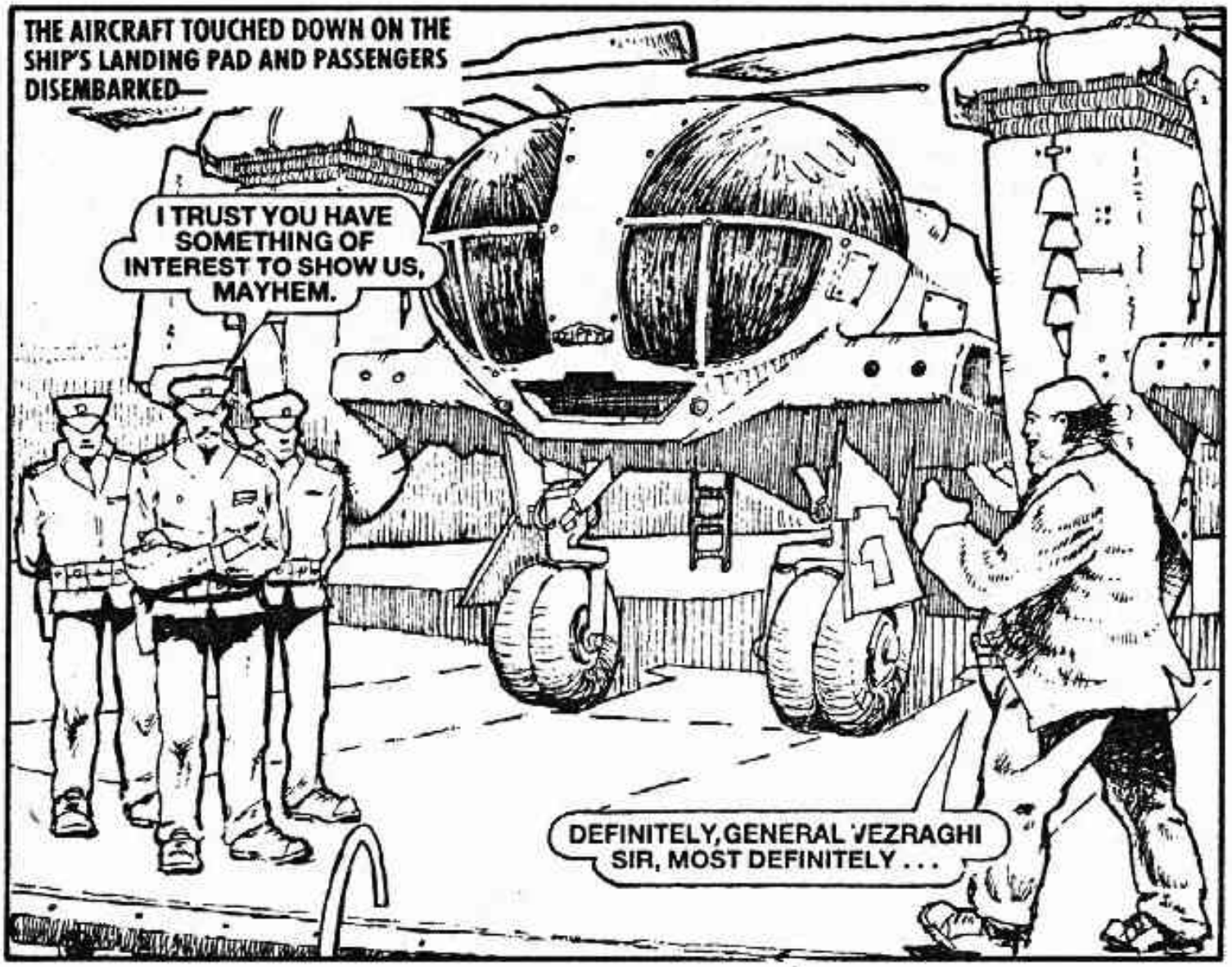

. . . TO TAKE A LITTLE SEA CRUISE WITH ME.

MAYHEM'S LUXURY YACHT LEFT DOCK—
SARGE . . . HEY, SARGE.
WHAT IS IT, CHERRY?

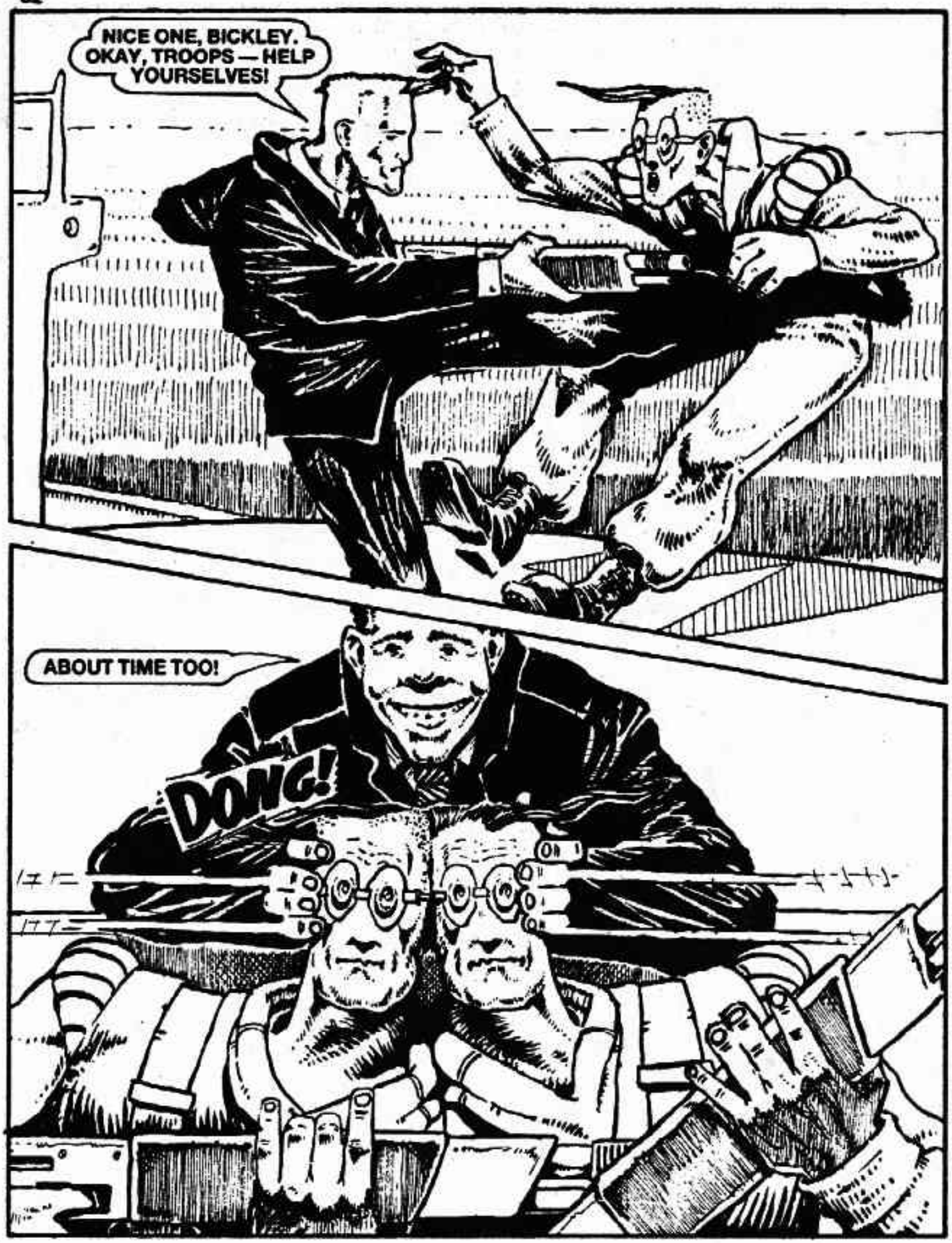

I — I STILL CAN'T SWIM.
RELAX, KID, NOBODY'S GOING TO BE DOING ANY SWIMMING . . .

. . . I HOPE!


AT THAT MOMENT . . .
TILT-ROTOR AIRCRAFT APPROACHING!


THE AIRCRAFT TOUCHED DOWN ON THE SHIP'S LANDING PAD AND PASSENGERS DISEMBARKED—
I TRUST YOU HAVE SOMETHING OF INTEREST TO SHOW US, MAYHEM.
DEFINITELY, GENERAL VEZRAGHI SIR, MOST DEFINITELY . . .

. . . I'VE MANAGED TO LAY ME HANDS ON ONE OF THE VERY LATEST AND . . . ER . . . EXPENSIVE OMNIPLEX BATTLE MACHINES — A DEATH DROID!
A PAN GENERAL!
BUT — BUT YOU CAN'T TRADE WITH PAN-CONTINENTAL ENTERPRISES. YOU'D BE BETRAYING OMNIPLEX INDUSTRIES, THE CARING SHARING COMPANY THAT EMPLOYS YOU . . . THAT EMPLOYS ALL OF US!
WHO IS THIS BABBLING FOOL?
I — I THOUGHT HE WAS ONE OF US . . . NOW I'M NOT SO SURE . . .

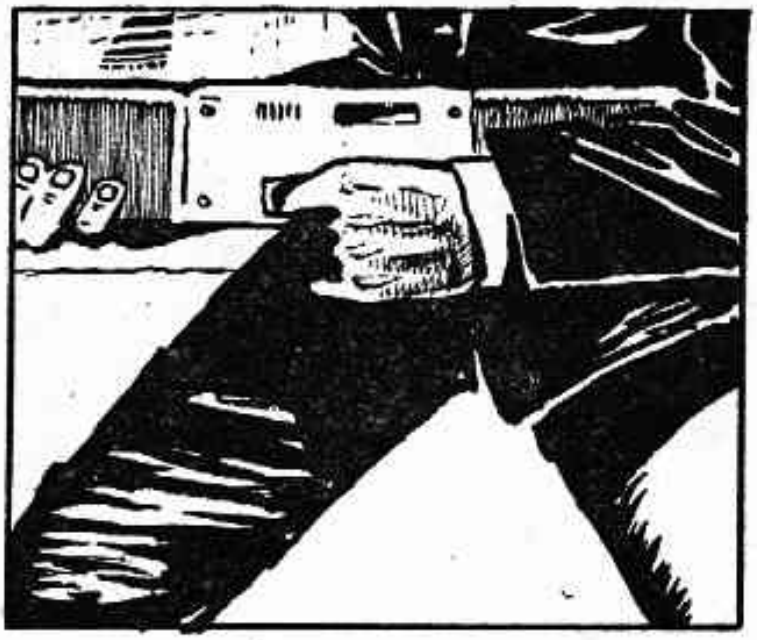

NICE ONE, BICKLEY. OKAY, TROOPS — HELP YOURSELVES!
ABOUT TIME TOO!
DONG!

KILL THEM!
NO, YOU DON'T!
SPLAT!
NNF!

STAY COOL, GENERAL BABY, UNLESS YOU WANT A D-I-Y VENTILATION SYSTEM.

CHERRY, MARTA — GET UP TO THE BRIDGE!

WE'RE ON IT, SARGE!



ARRGH!

UP ON THE BRIDGE . . .
I SURRENDER! THE SHIP IS YOURS — J-JUST DON'T LET THAT PSYCHO FEMALE NEAR ME.

WHERE'S BICKLEY?
LAST TIME I SAW HIM HE WAS DANCING WITH MAYHEM.
STOMP
MOVE OVER, FATTY! YOU'RE SQUASHING OUR PLATOON LEADER!
LOOKS LIKE THE LOOTENANT WENT AND GOT HIS DESIGNER SUIT ALL CRUMPLED!

KOF! KOF! YOU — YOU TRAITOR! WE'RE GOING TO TAKE YOU BACK AND TURN YOU OVER TO THE COMPANY'S PROFIT POLICE!
NO — NOT THE PROFIT POLICE! PLEASE NOT THAT! LOOK, I'LL MAKE YOU ALL RICH — IF YOU'LL JUST LET ME GO!
NOT A CHANCE MAYHEMMMMMMMMMF!
KEEP TALKING,FATTY — DON'T GO ALL SHY ON US NOW.
WELL . . . I KEEP ALL MY UNDECLARED PROFITS ABOARD THIS VESSEL. THERE'S A FORTUNE IN GOLD BARS LOCKED IN A STRONGROOM BELOW DECKS.

BELOW DECKS —
MAN, OH MAN!
WHADDYA THINK, SARGE?
I THINK IT'S TIME WE RETIRED FROM THE WAR.

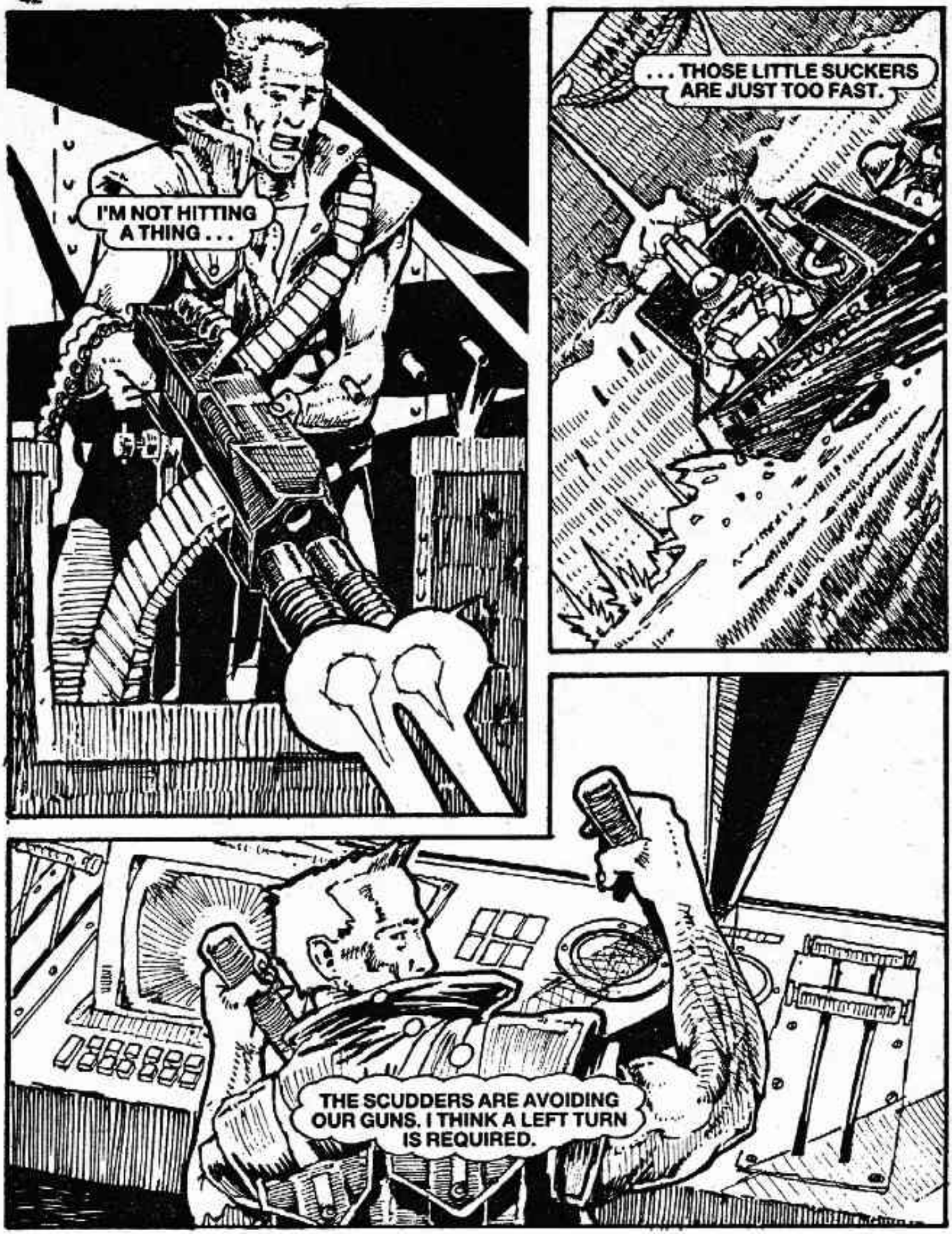
LATER . . .
THE GENERAL'S LOCKED UP AND WE'VE SET MAYHEM AND THE CREW ADRIFT, SARGE.
GOOD! NOW GATHER AROUND — I'VE GOT OUR RETIREMENT PLAN ALL WORKED OUT.
MAYHEM MUNITIONS

OBVIOUSLY WE'RE NOT GOING BACK AND THERE'S NO POINT IN SAILING AROUND IN CIRCLES JUST WAITING TO BE SUNK, SO THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY OUT . . .
THE SUEZIDE CANAL!
YOU CRAZY, SARGE? THAT CANAL CUTS STRAIGHT THROUGH NO-MAN'S LAND, IT AIN'T NOTHING BUT A DEATH-TRAP!
IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE — THERE'S AN OCEAN BIG ENOUGH FOR US TO HIDE IN AT THE OTHER END OF THE CANAL.

THE SUEZIDE CANAL —
THIS PLACE IS LIKE A GRAVEYARD, IT GIVES ME THE CREEPS!

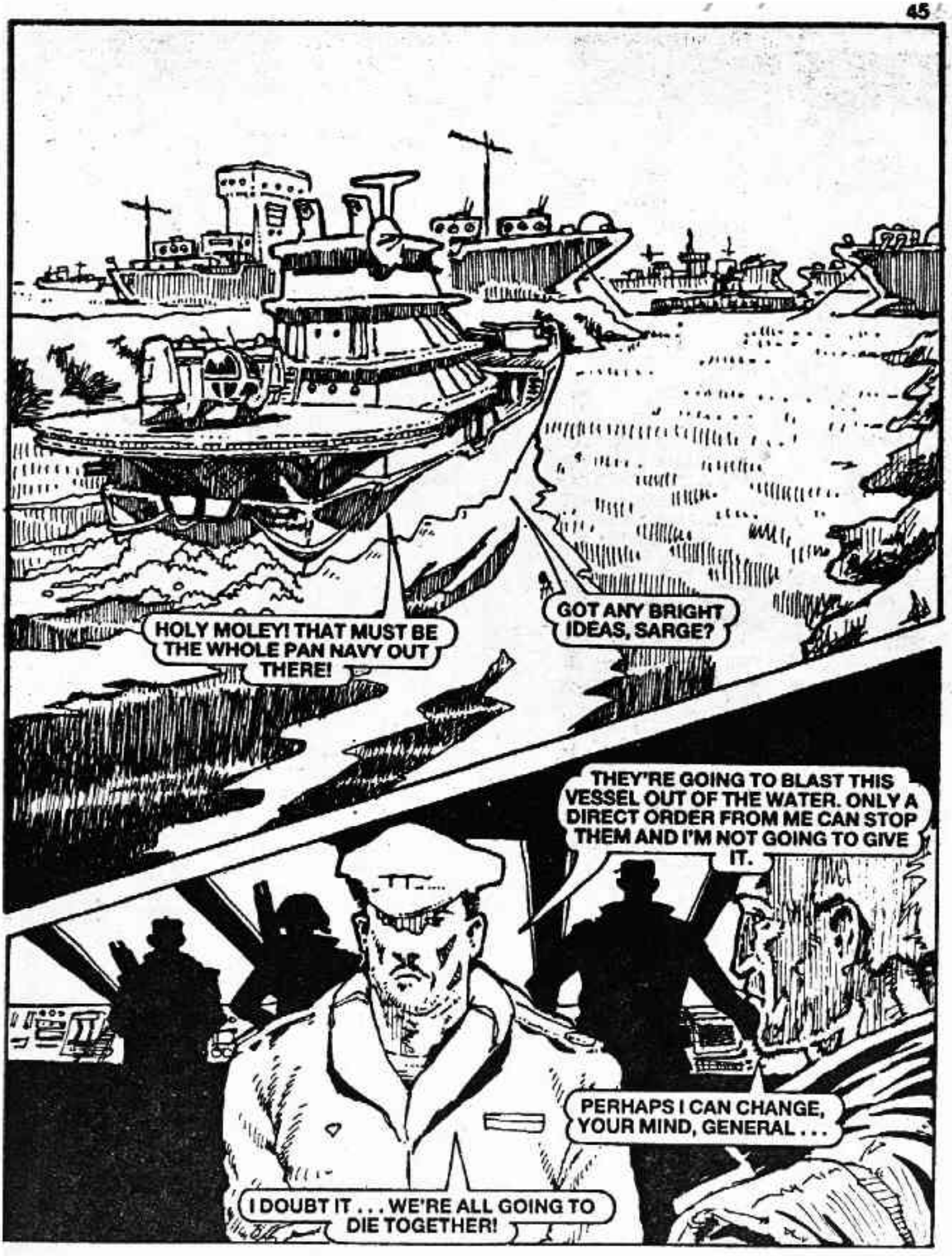
SUDDENLY...
WHAT WAS THAT?
BOOM
WHO KNOWS! BUT MAN THE GUNS!

PAN SCUDDERS! HOW'D THEY FIND US SO QUICKLY?


I'M NOT HITTING A THING . . .
. . . THOSE LITTLE SUCKERS ARE JUST TOO FAST.
THE SCUDDERS ARE AVOIDING OUR GUNS. I THINK A LEFT TURN IS REQUIRED.

THAT SHOULD DO IT!
THROWN INTO CONFUSION BY BRENNAN'S SUDDEN MANOEUVRE THE SCUDDERS BECAME EASY TARGETS.
WITHIN MINUTES, . .
THAT SHOWED 'EM, SARGE!
I DON'T LIKE IT . . . THEY WERE ON TO US TOO FAST. BRING THAT PAN GENERAL UP TO THE BRIDGE.

THE REASON WAS SOON FOUND —
THE GENERAL'S WRISTWATCH IS A PERSONAL DISTRESS BEACON.
YES, AND IT'S BEEN SENDING FOR SOME TIME. YOUR KIDNAP ATTEMPT IS DOOMED TO FAILURE. I SUGGEST THAT YOU RELEASE ME IMMEDIATELY.
THIS ISN'T A KIDNAP, GENERAL.
WELL, WHATEVER IT IS, IT'S FINISHING. TAKE A LOOK OUT OF THE WINDOW, SERGEANT.


HOLY MOLEY! THAT MUST BE THE WHOLE PAN NAVY OUT THERE!
GOT ANY BRIGHT IDEAS, SARGE?
THEY'RE GOING TO BLAST THIS VESSEL OUT OF THE WATER. ONLY A DIRECT ORDER FROM ME CAN STOP THEM AND I'M NOT GOING TO GIVE IT.
PERHAPS I CAN CHANGE, YOUR MIND, GENERAL . . .
I DOUBT IT . . . WE'RE ALL GOING TO DIE TOGETHER!

A FEW MINUTES LATER . . .
MY GOLD . . . OUR GOLD?
I'VE CHANGED MY MIND!

THE NEXT DAY . . .
FIFTY PERCENT! HALF OF THE GOLD GONE! THE GENERAL WAS A BIGGER CROOK THAN MAYHEM.
RELAX MAJUBA, THAT WAS HIS PRICE FOR GETTING US THROUGH THE BLOCKADE. WE HAD TO PAY IT — WE DIDN'T HAVE ANY CHOICE.

ANYWAY THERE'S STILL ENOUGH GOLD LEFT TO BUY US A NICE QUIET PARADISE ISLAND. WE'RE HOME FREE . . .
NOT QUITE . . .

IT'S YOU,LIEUTENANT, WHERE'VE YOU BEEN HIDING?
I HAVEN'T BEEN HIDING, I'VE BEEN SEARCHING. SEARCHING FOR A WAY TO STOP YOU TRAITORS STEALING THE COMPANY'S PROFITS . . .

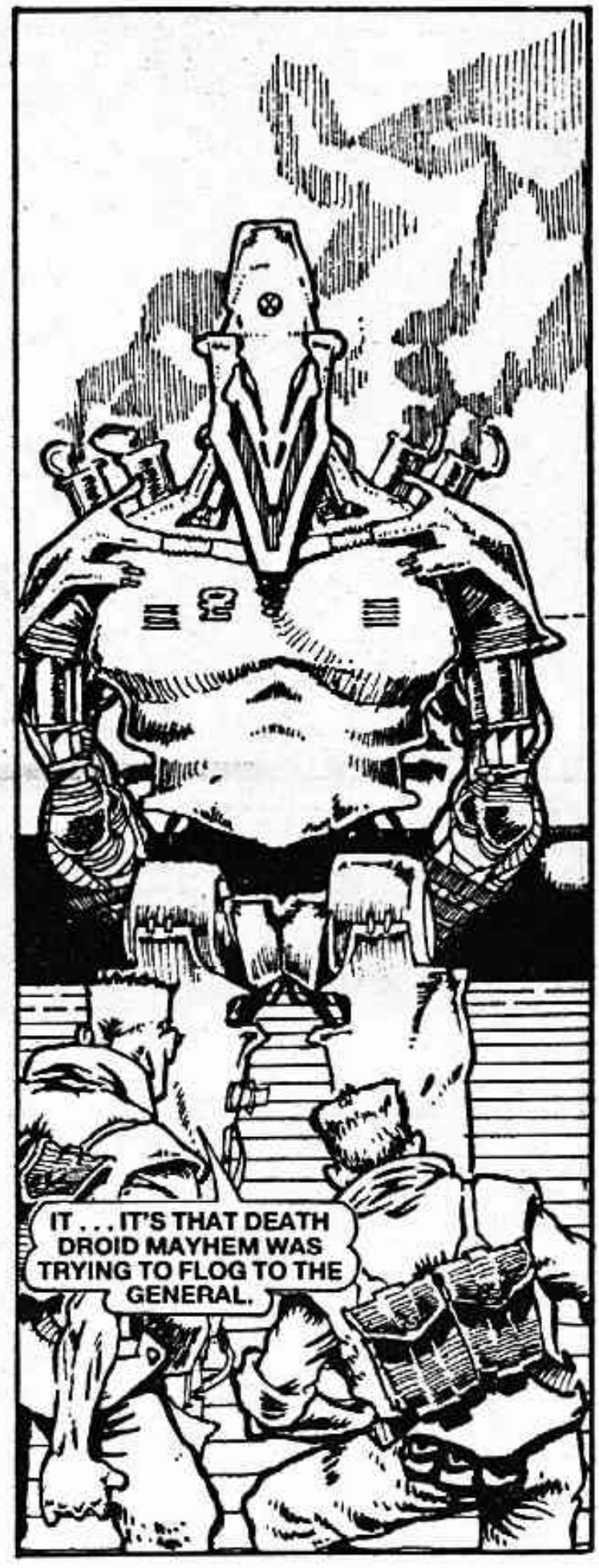
. . . AND I THINK I'VE FOUND IT.
MM
YOU'VE GOT IT ALL WRONG, LIEUTENANT. WE DIDN'T STEAL ANYTHING FROM THE COMPANY, THAT WAS ALL MAYHEM'S DOING.
MM
CLICK!
PAH! YOU'RE ALL GUILTY! YOUR FEEBLE EXCUSES WON'T SAVE YOU NOW.

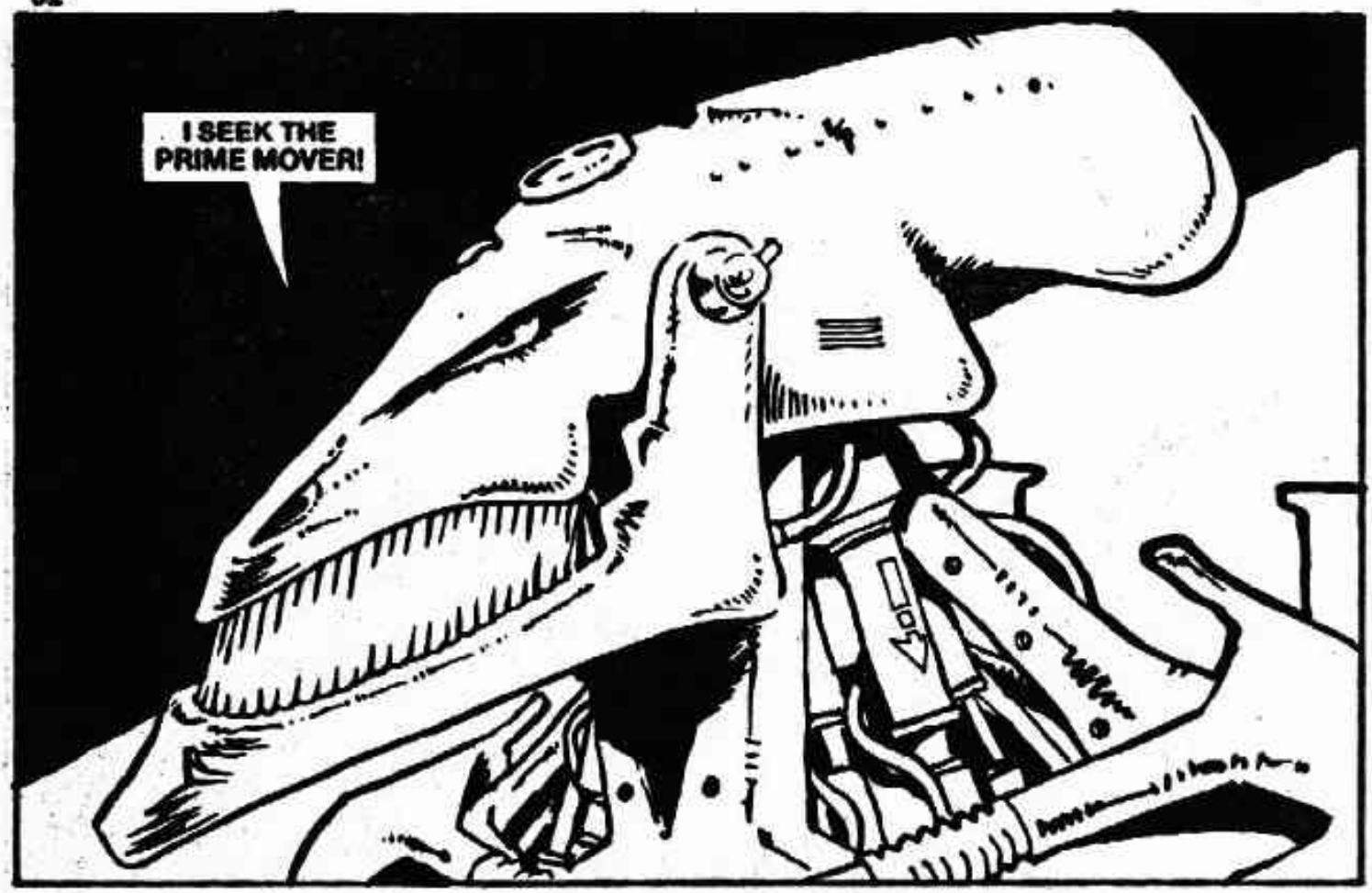
A SLOW MINUTE PASSED . . .
WHAT HAPPENED?
M.M.
NOTHING . . . NOT A THING!
THE LIEUTENANT MUST HAVE FOUND ANOTHER ONE OF MAYHEM'S DUDS.

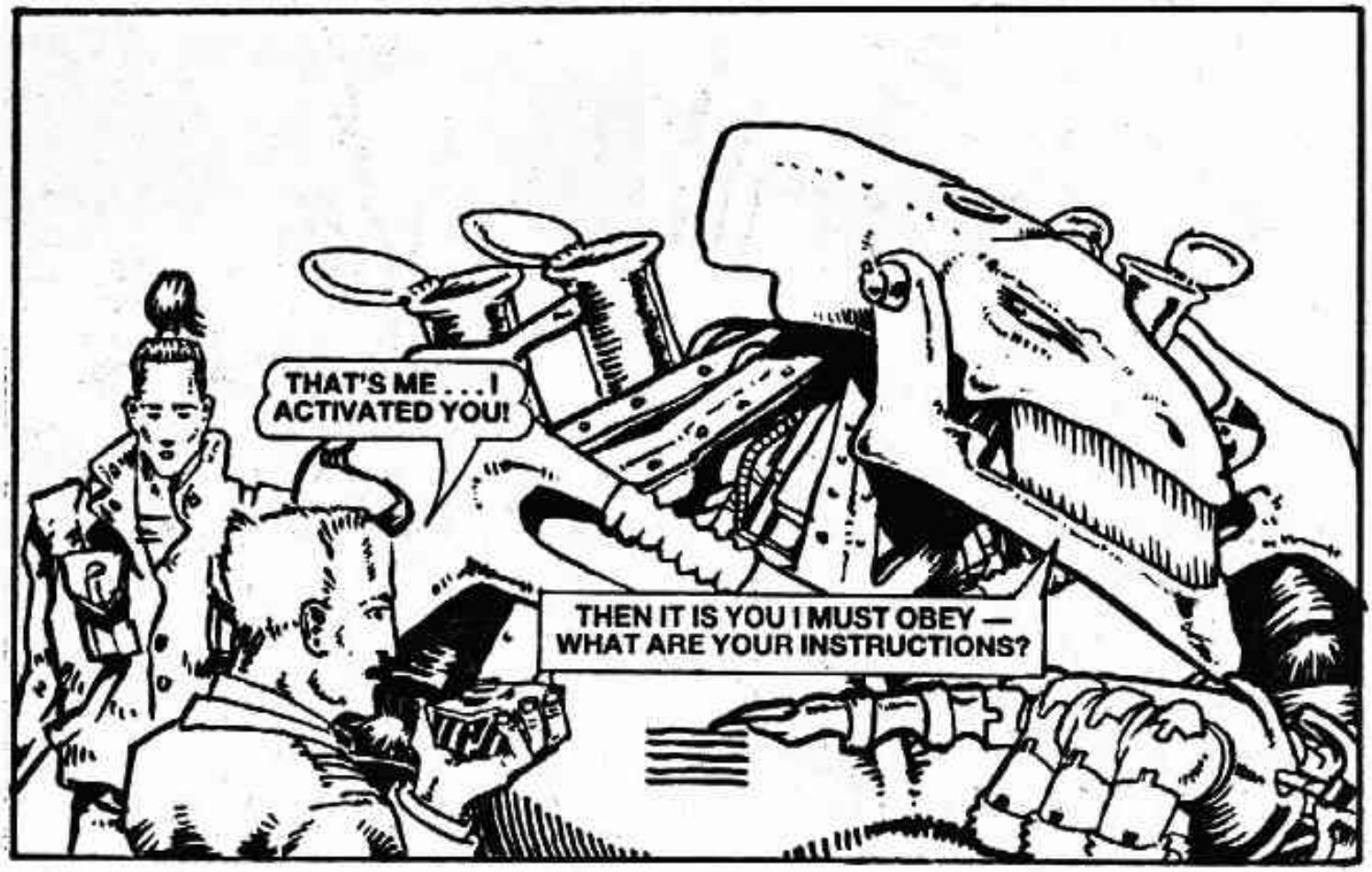
AT THAT MOMENT, BELOW DECKS . . .
KRUMP!

WELL, LIEUTENANT, WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO LOCK YOU UP UNTIL WE REACH A SAFE PLACE TO PUT YOU ASHORE . . .
WHAT WAS THAT CRASH?
IT'S MARTA, SARGE! SHE'S STAYING UNDER COVER — SHE SENSES TROUBLE!
UH-OH!
M.P.

WHOOSH
WHAT WAS THAT?


IT . . . IT'S THAT DEATH DROID MAYHEM WAS TRYING TO FLOG TO THE GENERAL.

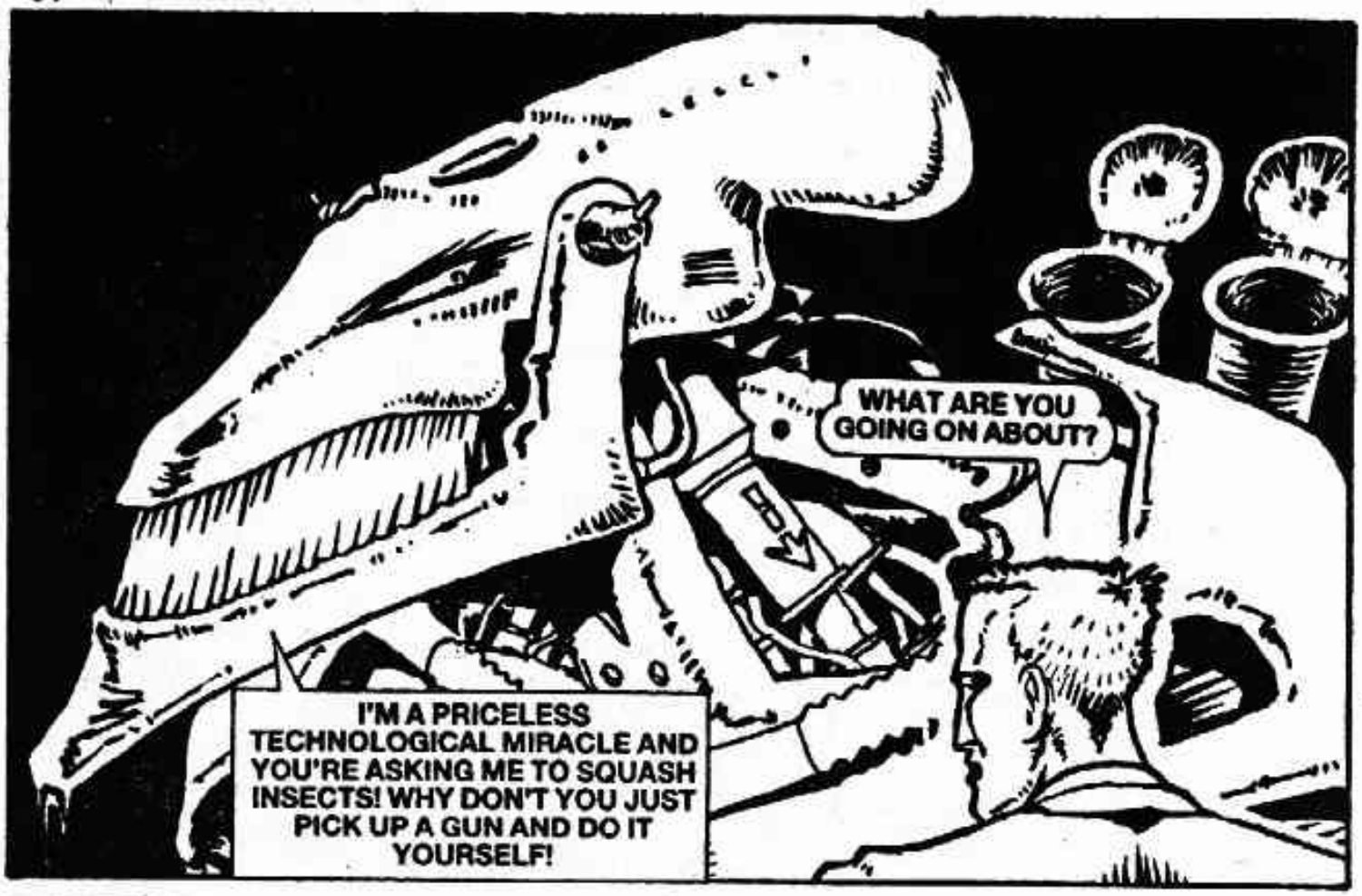

I SEEK THE PRIME MOVER!

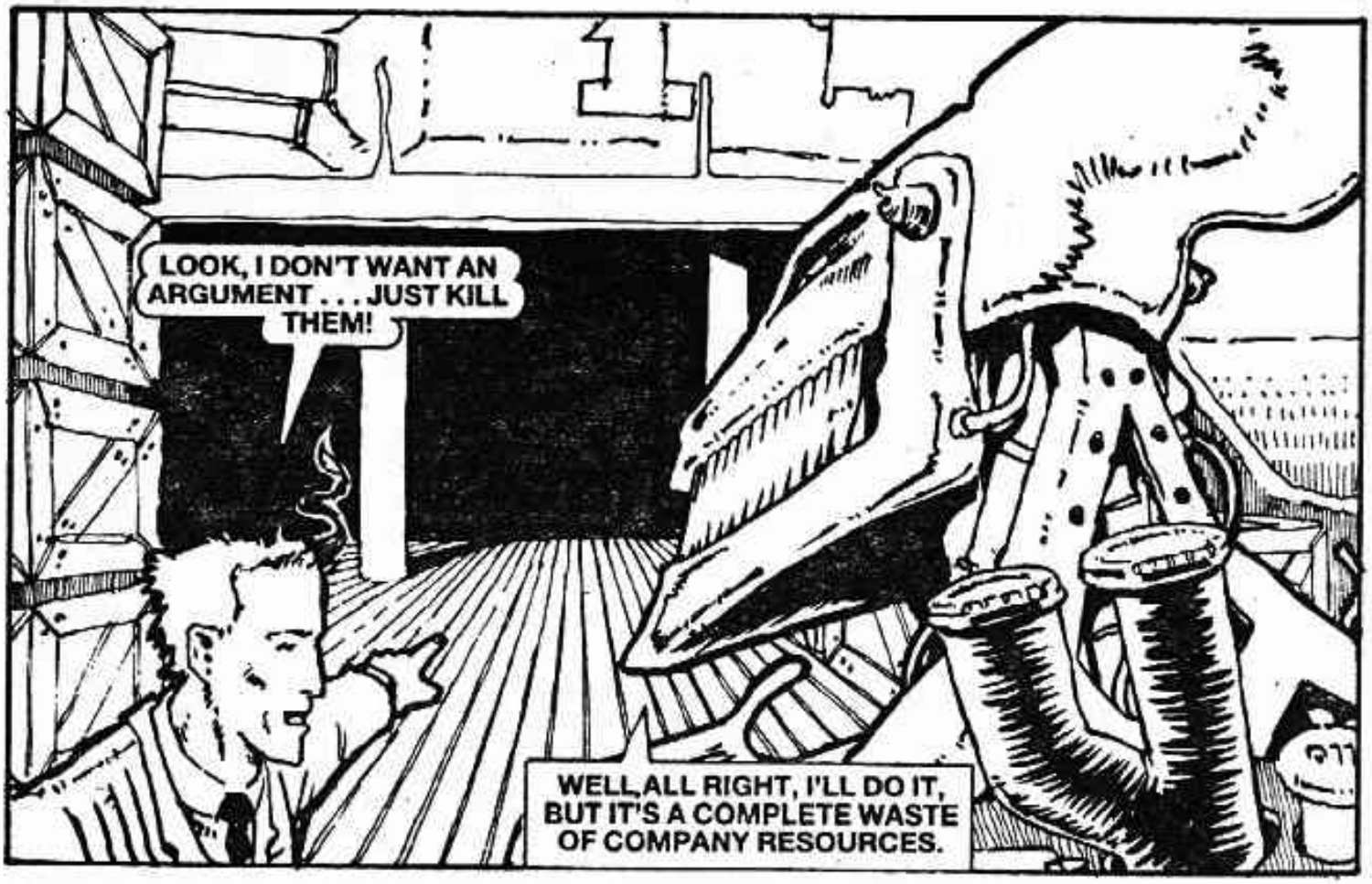

THAT'S ME . . . I ACTIVATED YOU!
THEN IT IS YOU I MUST OBEY — WHAT ARE YOUR INSTRUCTIONS?

THEY ARE OUR ENEMIES, TRAITORS TO THE COMPANY . . . DESTROY THEM!
IS THAT ALL?
OIL

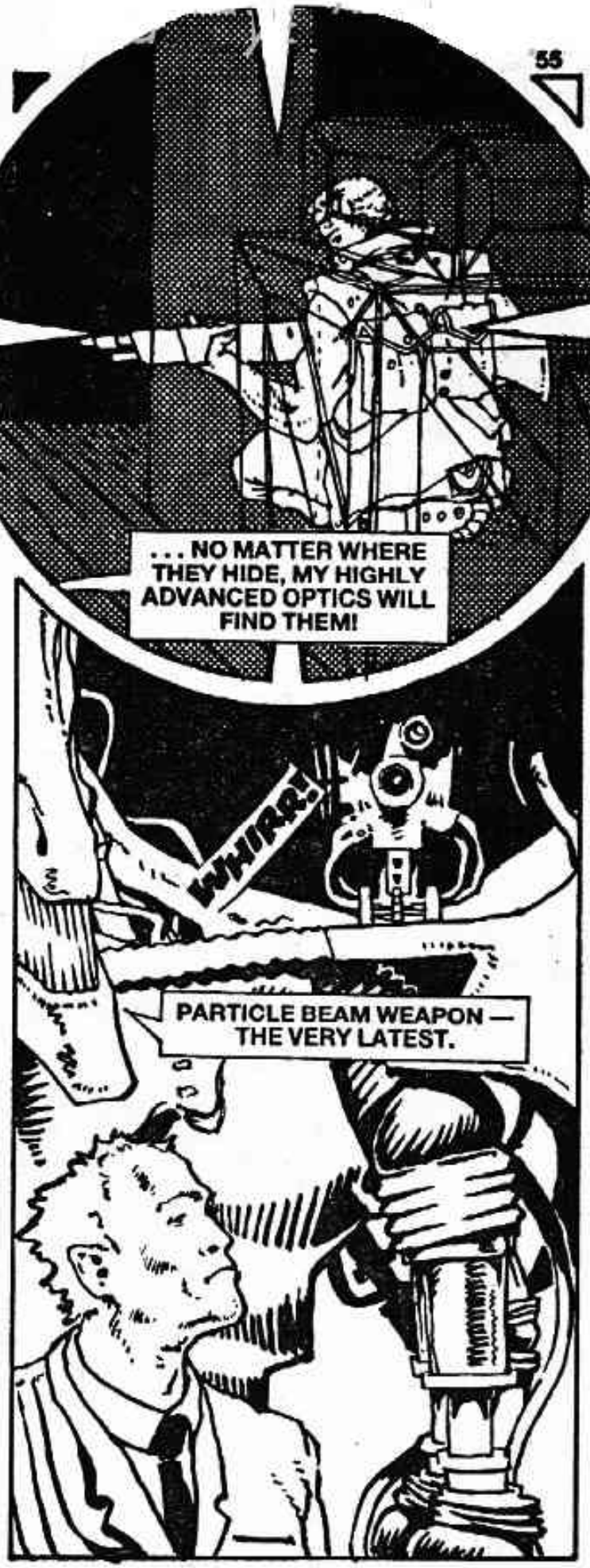
WHA-WHAT DO YOU MEAN — IS THAT ALL?
I MEAN IT'S NOT REALLY MY LINE OF WORK IS IT? NOW IF YOU'D WANTED A BATTLESHIP SINKING OR AN ARMOURED COLUMN TYING IN KNOTS . . .

JUST TERMINATE THOSE TROOPERS!
MAY I REMIND YOU OF THE VAST SUMS OF COMPANY MONEY THAT HAVE BEEN PUT INTO MY DEVELOPMENT!


WHAT ARE YOU GOING ON ABOUT?
I'M A PRICELESS TECHNOLOGICAL MIRACLE AND YOU'RE ASKING ME TO SQUASH INSECTS! WHY DON'T YOU JUST PICK UP A GUN AND DO IT YOURSELF!

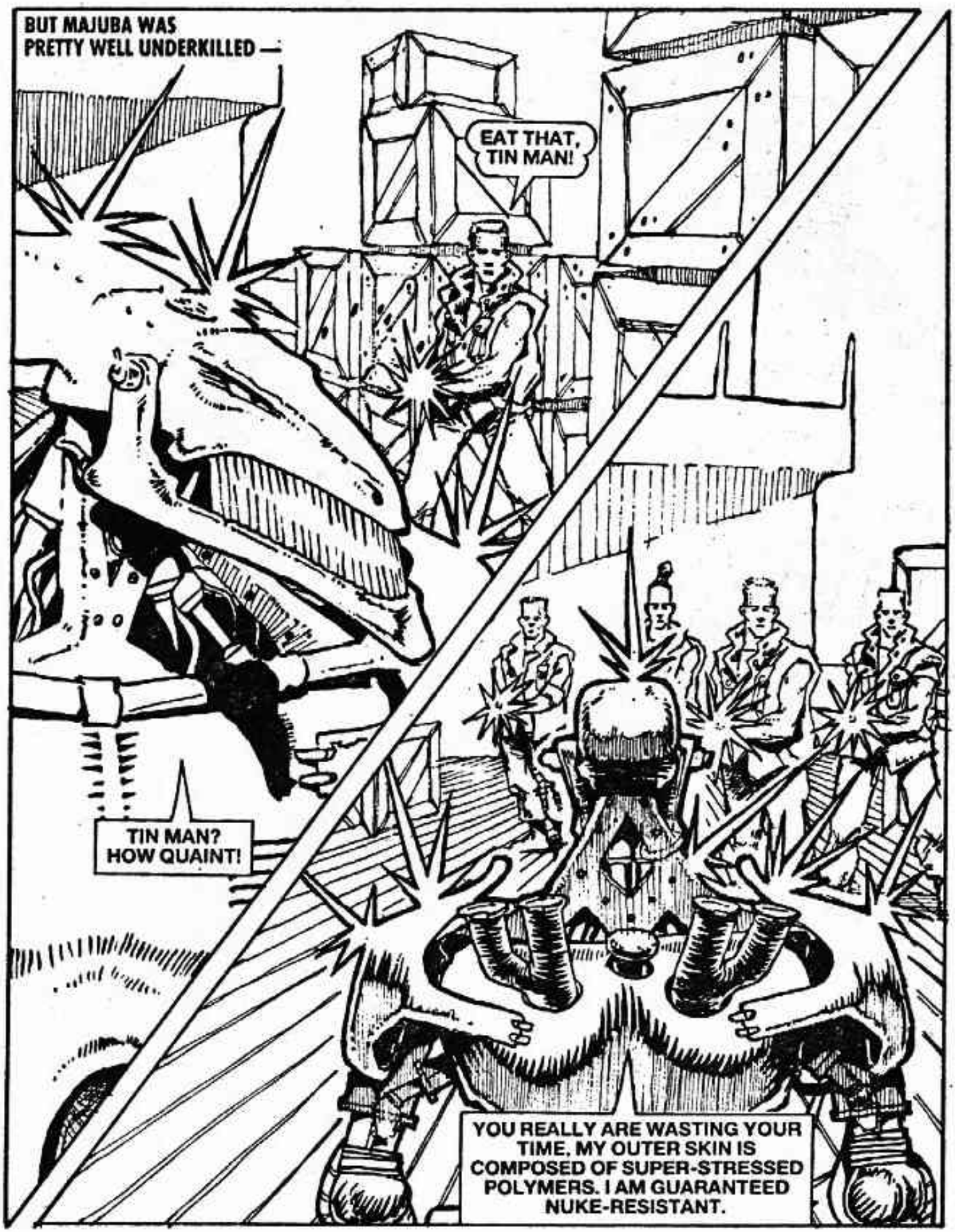

LOOK, I DON'T WANT AN ARGUMENT . . . JUST KILL THEM!
WELL, ALL RIGHT, I'LL DO IT, BUT IT'S A COMPLETE WASTE OF COMPANY RESOURCES.

NOW SEE WHAT YOU'VE DONE — THEY'VE ESCAPED!
DON'T BE RIDICULOUS, NO-ONE ESCAPES ME . . .


. . . NO MATTER WHERE THEY HIDE, MY HIGHLY ADVANCED OPTICS WILL FIND THEM!
WHURR!
PARTICLE BEAM WEAPON — THE VERY LATEST.

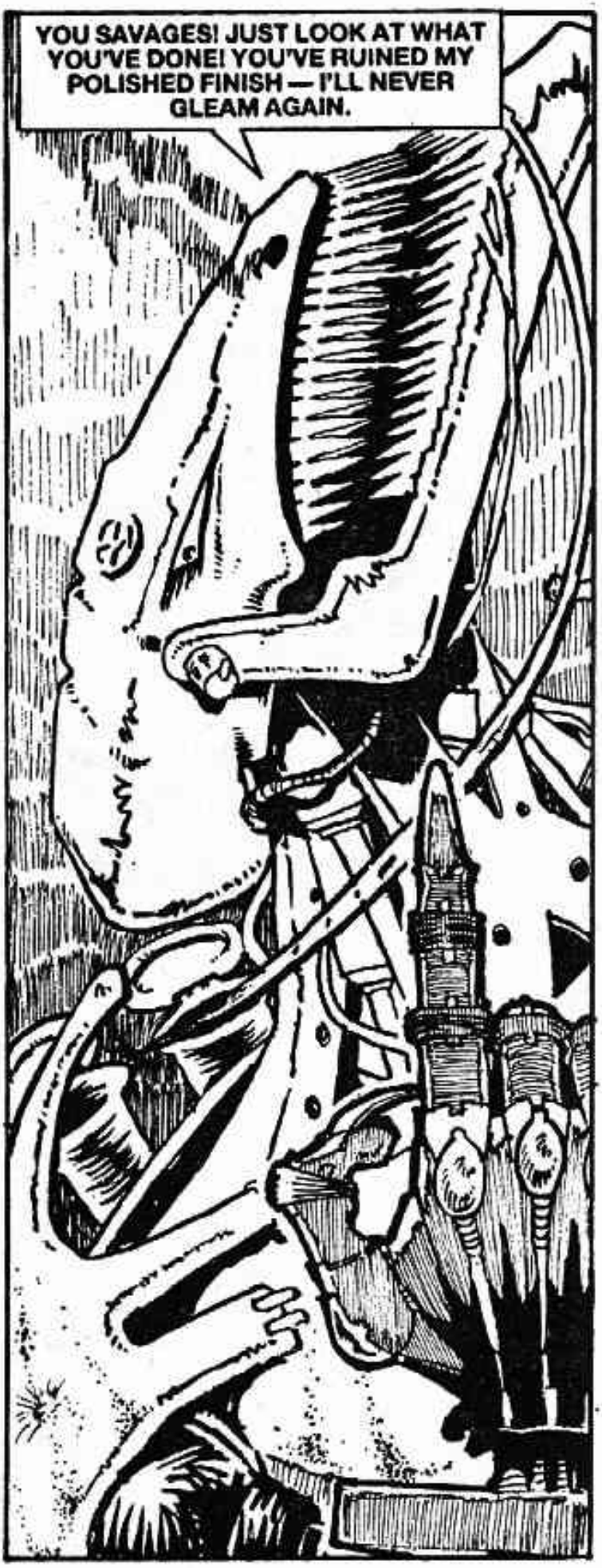
CRUMP!
BLOOMIN' HECK!
WHAP!

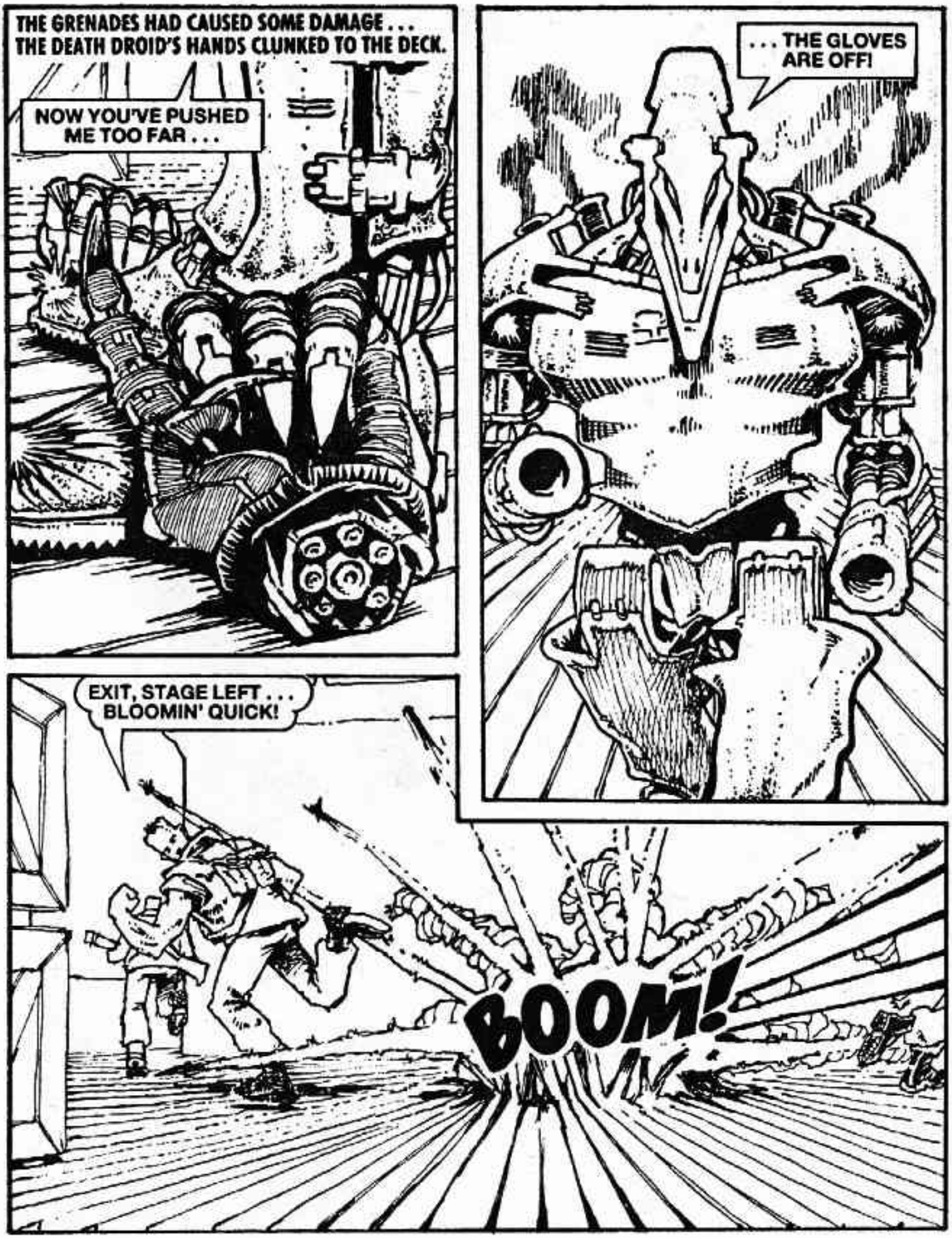
NO SIGN OF THE TRAITOR. HE MUST HAVE BEEN TOTALLY VAPOURISED. THIS IS A CLEAR CASE OF OVERKILL!

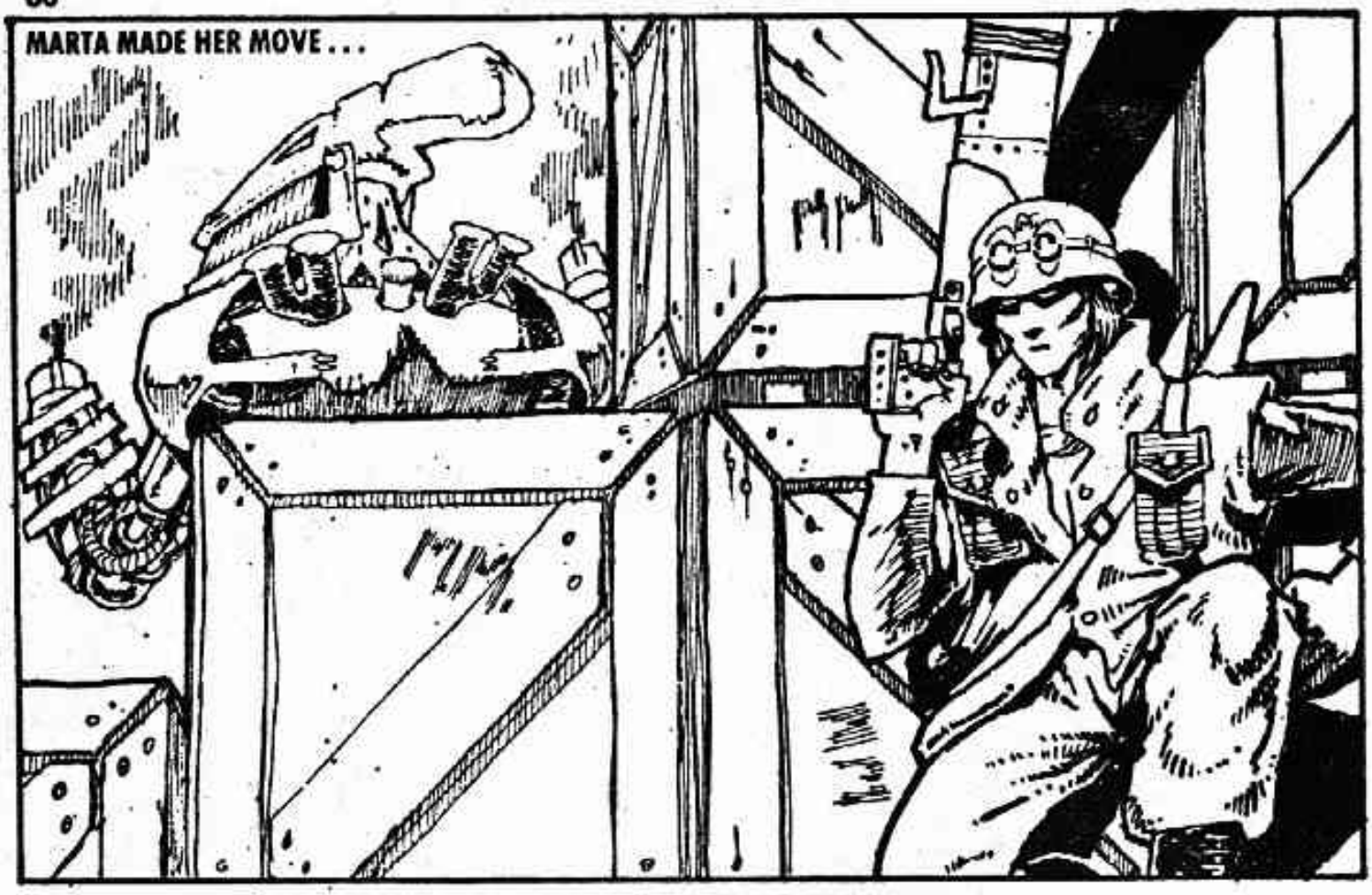

BUT MAJUBA WAS PRETTY WELL UNDERKILLED —
EAT THAT, TIN MAN!
TIN MAN? HOW QUAINT!
YOU REALLY ARE WASTING YOUR TIME. MY OUTER SKIN IS COMPOSED OF SUPER-STRESSED POLYMERS. I AM GUARANTEED NUKE-RESISTANT.

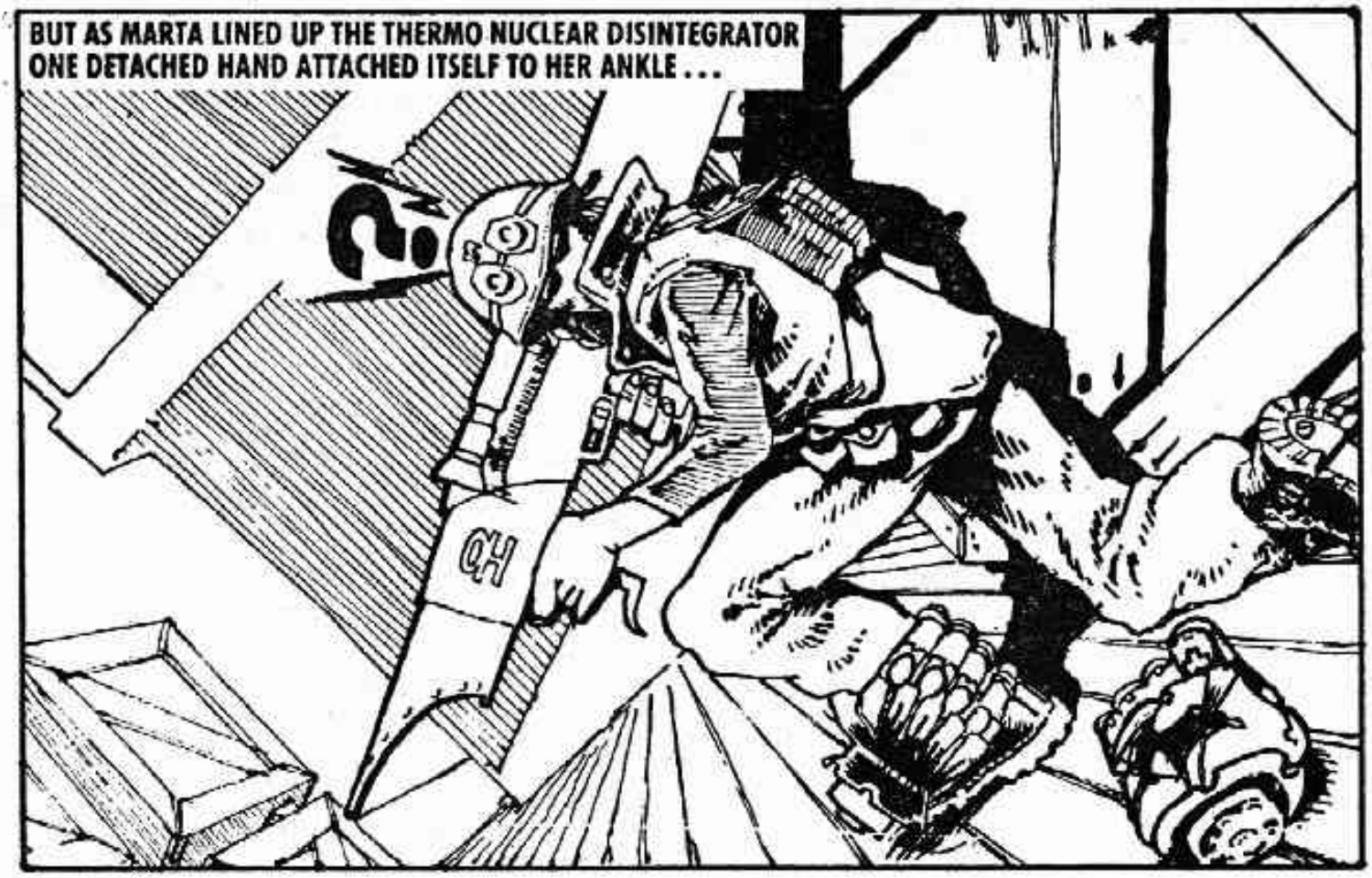
WELL YOU CAN'T BLAME US FOR TRYING — HOW ABOUT GRENADES?

WHUMP!
BLAM!


YOU SAVAGES! JUST LOOK AT WHAT YOU'VE DONE! YOU'VE RUINED MY POLISHED FINISH — I'LL NEVER GLEAM AGAIN.


THE GRENADES HAD CAUSED SOME DAMAGE . . . THE DEATH DROID'S HANDS CLUNKED TO THE DECK.
NOW YOU'VE PUSHED ME TOO FAR . . .
. . . THE GLOVES ARE OFF!
EXIT, STAGE LEFT . . . BLOOMIN' QUICK!
BOOM!


MARTA MADE HER MOVE . . .


BUT AS MARTA LINED UP THE THERMO NUCLEAR DISINTEGRATOR ONE DETACHED HAND ATTACHED ITSELF TO HER ANKLE . . .
?!
CH

YOU'VE GOT TO HAND IT TO ME . . .

. . . I'M NOTHING IF NOT VERSATILE . . .

I'VE WASTED ENOUGH TIME ON YOU WORMS! SURRENDER YOURSELVES NOW, OR I'LL CRUSH THIS ONE'S SKULL!
THE PLATOON HAD NO ALTERNATIVE —
ABOUT TIME TOO! YOUR DEATHS SHALL BE QUICK AND PAINLESS!

BEGINNING WITH THIS ONE . . .

YOU . . . YOU'RE . . . YOU'RE . . .

. . . YOU'RE PRETTY!

MARTA — CATCH!

MARTA CAUGHT BLADES' LASER KNIFE AND ACTIVATED IT —
ZZZZZZZZ

ARRRRZZZZZZZZ!

WELL, THEY SAID IT WOULD CUT THROUGH ANYTHING.
LOOK, OUT THERE!

THE LIEUTENANT'S ABANDONING SHIP!
I'LL SEE YOU ROT, YOU TRAITOR . . . I'LL BE BACK!
HE'S GOING BACK TO THE KILLING TRADE. THAT'S WHERE HE'S HAPPIEST.

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DON'T MISS

THIS MONTH'S OTHER ACTION-PACKED ADVENTURE

NOW ON SALE

THE KILLING TRADE

War, as we know it, had disappeared from the face of the Earth by the 22nd Century. But war was still there. Oh, yes, it was very much in evidence . . . but it was now BIG business. None of your petty squabbles of territorial disputes, no ideolological struggles . . . just megadeath. Y'see, the multinationals had moved in . . . take-over battles didn't take place in Wall Street, London or Tokio money houses, but in the arid wastes of North Africa, the Red Sea, and the deserts of Europe. And the greater the escalation, the greater the profits. Yes, the BIG money was in the Killing Trade . . .

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